



BLUE^{AND} GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 9.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 7, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

OUT WITH GRANT! OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE IN TENNESSEE.

BY LIEUT. HARRY LEE.



Jack Clark dashed up to the spot where stood General Grant. Lifting his cap, he pointed to the river and shouted: "We are attacked, General. The Confederates are upon us!"

With a grim expression upon his face General Grant heard the news.

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CHAPTER I.

TRANSFERRED TO THE WEST.

The opening months of the great American Civil War, in the year of 1861, had passed and the coming of the new year saw many changes in the disposition of troops on both sides and the general character of the contest was much altered.

People in the North had abandoned the idea that a few hard battles would bring matters to an end. They had become resigned to the fact that a long and bloody war was upon their hands.

The first bitter flash of temper and acrimony had yielded to the dogged persistence and determination of a feud which was to last through four long years.

The inactivity of McClellan in Virginia was not by any means to find imitation in the West. Generals Grant and McClernand were fighting hard battles against those able Confederate generals, Floyd, Pillow and Buckner.

Tennessee was one great battlefield. The valleys of the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers were occupied by thousands of troops whose movements were guided by some of the greatest minds of the war.

In the Army of the Potomac at this time there was a

small independent and volunteer company of youths known as the Fairdale Blues.

Most of them were natives of the town of Fairdale, New York, and they had left school and rallied under the leadership of a brilliant young captain, Jack Clark. They had offered their services to the Union and had done gallant service at Bull Run and minor battles in the early period of the war.

Jack Clark, however, was not satisfied with the period of inactivity which existed on the Potomac during the winter of 1861-2.

He chafed at inaction, and one day received an inspiration which he at once communicated to his lieutenant, Hal Martin. Jack had studied the situation in the West and said:

"I believe that great battles will be fought in Tennessee. I think it is our duty to be at the front. What do you think, Hal, of the plan to go West?"

"Will President Lincoln or General McClellan give us permission?"

"I will ask them. In the first place, however, let us talk with the boys."

So an hour later at drill, Jack addressed the Blues, and the response was eager and hearty. "All were in favor unanimously of the project."

The result was that Jack Clark promptly interviewed General McClellan. At first that great general was not in favor of the plan. Later, however, Jack obtained an audience with the President.

President Lincoln knit his brows.

"Ah," he said, "so you want to go West, do you? Spoiling for fight, eh?"

"We want to have something to do," said Jack Clark. "Winter is upon us. It is hardly likely that there will be much fighting in this part of the country before next spring."

"That is true," said President Lincoln in a reflective way.

"Now I think we can be of service to General Grant."

The President turned to his desk and looked over some papers. Finally he said:

"Clark, I am going to grant your request. I will have you and your company of Blues transferred to the Army of the West. I shall see General McClellan this afternoon and I will instruct the Secretary of War to make the transfer at once."

"I thank you," replied Jack with a thrill of pleasure. "We shall hope to do something creditable in the near future."

"I have no doubt of that, my boy," said the careworn President with a ring of sadness in his voice. "Now that the war can be no longer put off, it is well to make it as short as possible."

Jack bowed himself out and soon was speeding on his way to the camping ground of his company.

Two days later they were on their way to the army headquarters at Cairo, Illinois. There they were mustered in as an independent volunteer company.

General Grant was at this time busy planning the campaign which was to result in the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson. He welcomed the Blues warmly, and shaking hands with young Captain Clark said in his terse manner:

"I have heard of you, Clark. I think you will find an opportunity to distinguish yourself here."

"That is what we want, general," said Jack readily.

General Grant turned to his table and scanned a map. Then he spoke to an orderly:

"Send Colonel Spicer here."

The orderly departed. At a gesture from the general Jack seated himself.

General Grant had not yet won that fame which eventually resulted in giving him supreme command of the combined armies of the United States. But he had all the characteristics which later bore him on to success.

"Let me see," he said finally. "Is your company fully equipped?"

"They are in the best of trim and ready to start at once upon a campaign," said Jack.

Just then the orderly returned. With him was a short thin man with a tufted beard and a dare-devil light in his eyes.

Colonel Jed Spicer was well known as the best cavalry officer of his class at that time and place. His daring deeds

would have filled a volume, and he was known alike friend and foe as a daring man.

He saluted and General Grant eyed him.

"Spicer," he said curtly, "this is Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. He is just from Virginia."

"I am glad to meet Clark," said Spicer.

"And I am glad to meet you," said Jack.

"Now, Spicer," said General Grant in his matter of fact way, "you know that Foote is expected to co-operate with us in an attack upon Fort Henry."

"Yes, sir."

"Of course, it will be a desperate undertaking. But we hope to succeed, and that success will open to us the gateway of Tennessee."

"I believe it will, sir."

"There is, however, a little stumbling block in the way. Our troops fully equipped are to embark on transports for Paducah and thence up the Tennessee. Foote will make the attack on the water, and the troops by land. I shall send our best guns and our bravest men. Fort Henry must be taken. Just now, however, we are annoyed by the Confederate General Bridges, who with some fifteen hundred mounted men are making a dash here and there through our line between here and Paducah. They have already destroyed many thousands of dollars worth of our supplies.

"Bridges must be checked. His command must be captured or driven back. You are the best man I know of to do this. I want you to take your troop and hunt this guerrilla down."

Colonel Spicer nodded.

"All right, general," he said as he started to leave the tent. General Grant put up his hand.

"Wait. Where are you going?"

"I am going to hunt down Bridges!"

"Do you know where to look for him?"

"I think I can find him!"

"How many men have you in your troop, Spicer?"

"Eight hundred."

"Your force will be smaller than that of Bridges."

"I don't care for that, sir. We will whip him, I believe!"

"I like your spirit, Spicer. It presages success. But I would rather you would be better equipped to meet Bridges, who is alert and cunning as a fox. Clark, how would you like to join Spicer's troop on this expedition?"

Jack looked at General Grant for a moment in surprise. This was an unexpected proposition to him.

"Why—I had not thought of it," he stammered. "We are ready for anything, but my boys are not mounted."

"That is easily overcome. Yours is a company that can be easily mounted."

"Oh, yes. We went through one short campaign on horseback."

"That settles it," said General Grant. "I believe you and Spicer have the tenacity of purpose and the pluck to beat Bridges. I want you to put him out of the game at any cost. He actually threatens the success of our enterprise."

Jack turned to Spicer.

"I shall be pleased to go under Colonel Spicer's command," he said. "I place myself subject to his orders."

Spicer seemed much pleased.

"No," he said, "yours is an independent company, Clark. I shall seek your advice and co-operate with you upon mutual terms and equal authority."

"Well spoken, Spicer," said General Grant with pleasure, "but as your rank is higher than Clark's you must be nominally the head of the expedition."

"That is fit and proper," said Jack.

"I think we shall agree all right," said Spicer. "Do you wish us to start at once?"

"Within three hours at the furthest," said General Grant. "I am exceedingly anxious that Bridges should at least be held in check before our expedition starts."

"We will do our best!"

"I feel sure of that."

Jack Clark went back to his company. Hal Martin saw at once that something was up by the expression of his face.

"Well, Jack," he asked, "what is the word now?"

"We are lucky," replied the young captain. "We are intrusted with a very important mission."

"The deuce you say! What is it?"

Jack explained and Hal listened with interest. When the other boys learned the truth they were in high spirits.

The expedition promised lively adventure and sharp fighting, and this was just what they wanted. Moreover, the thought of getting into the saddle was a pleasant one.

It did not take long for the Blues to get equipped for their long march. The next hour was a busy one for Jack and Hal.

The Blues were compelled to equip themselves more lightly. They carried their muskets and haversacks just the same, but many other equipments were left behind.

By General Grant's order horses were furnished them. The Blues had been in the saddle once before in the Virginia campaign, so that it was no new experience to them.

They were soon ready for the start.

Spicer's men, of course, were quite ready, for they were light cavalry and had their horses and equipments.

The Blues had just completed all preparations when Colonel Spicer rode up and dismounted.

In his hand he held an order from General Grant. He handed it to Jack.

"Read this," he said. "It will give you an idea of what is before us."

Jack took the order and read as follows:

"Colonel Jed Spicer: Immediately upon receipt of this notify Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues, and with his company march to the levee, where the Prairie Belle has steam up waiting to take you aboard. She will steam up the Ohio to Flood's Bayou, where you will disembark at a point known to Captain Warden. Thence you will follow the route by points of compass as per the enclosed map. You will effect a junction later with our forces at Paducah.

"(Signed) U. S. GRANT, General Commanding."

Jack read this with interest. He studied the map a moment and saw by it that the route prescribed led through a wild region of swamps and bayous.

It was certain that there would be plenty of hardship and danger in the undertaking. But Jack Clark was not the one to shrink from this.

"What do you think of it?" asked Spicer.

"It's all right," replied Jack readily. "My men are ready to go aboard the Prairie Belle at once."

"Good! March down to the levee and I will join you there with my men."

So the start was made. A half hour later the nine hundred men and their horses were aboard the Prairie Belle and another small river steamer.

The two vessels set out up the Ohio under a good head of steam. Cairo, that city of low lying flats and levees, was left far behind.

As the two steamers made their way up the muddy current of the Ohio the Blues crowded the rail and watched the wooded shores.

Those shores were patrolled by Union guards, but in spite of that small bands of guerrillas and bushwhackers at times broke through and attempted to hold up any passing craft.

The Prairie Belle carried a swivel gun forward. Just as she rounded a bend in the river a short while after leaving Cairo a volley of musket balls swept her deck.

Four of Spicer's men fell. In an instant there was an uproar.

Men sprung to arms. The steamer's gun was manned and shells were thrown into the woods.

But by this time the foe had vanished. Jack was for going ashore after them, but Spicer only said:

"Keep cool, my boy. Our time is coming. We will draw them into a trap, which is better than fighting them on their own ground."

CHAPTER II.

THE BAYOU BATTERY.

Jack could see the logic of this well enough. So he said no more.

The Prairie Belle shelled the woods incessantly. But no guard was sent ashore. Finally she went on her course.

For some while the two steamers kept on their way.

Then suddenly the Belle began to bear away upon a new tack. Then it was seen that the river had widened into the mouth of a bayou.

Into this they steamed. Spicer, who stood beside Jack on the forward deck, said:

"This is Flood's Bayou. There are thousands of acres in swamps and bayous here. It is an ideal place for guerrillas to hide and from thence to strike deadly blows at Grant's lines of communication."

"Then you think Bridges has his headquarters in this place?" asked Jack.

"I think he is hiding here at present."

"It looks to me, though, more like work for a gunboat than for cavalry. We would have to swim our horses to fight here."

"Oh, but that is what the Belle and the Uno have guns for. They will shell every part of the swamps and drive the guerrillas out. They will be compelled to get out, very likely to the southward. We are then to land at Crosset's Point and head them off."

Jack nodded in assent. As yet, though, the plan of campaign was to him a bit vague. But it was not for him to criticise.

Steadily through the intricacies of the bayou and its myriad waterways the two steamers felt their way.

When General Grant sent this expedition against Bridges into Flood's Bayou he made one great mistake, as after events proved.

He had sent cavalry to chase the famous guerrilla chief. With this cavalry he should have sent a battery and a gunboat as well should have accompanied the two sidewheel steamers.

For suddenly, as the Prairie Belle swung into a narrow channel, a roar and a great puff of smoke emanated from the cover of underbrush on the shore and a solid shot went ploughing through her pilot house.

The steering gear and the pilot very fortunately escaped by a close margin. But in an instant Captain Warden was upon the bridge and giving excited orders.

The forward gun was quickly manned and fired in the direction from which the hostile shot had come.

But once again the unseen battery spoke, and this time a shell burst upon the Belle's deck.

A number of Spicer's men were killed and wounded. Another shot passed through the cabin.

By this time the pilot had brought the Belle to a stop and was reversing her engines to get out of range. Just then there was an explosion in the hold and members of the crew came rushing out excitedly.

The whole interior of the vessel forward was in flames.

On board her were crowded fully six hundred men. The waters of the bayou were deep and muddy.

Should she go down it was more than likely that few of them would reach the shore. It was a thrilling situation.

Yet there was no panic.

Colonel Spicer and Jack Clark spoke firm words of command to the men and at once they were organized to fight the fire as effectually as possible. Meanwhile, as the Belle drifted the forward gun was kept at work.

The Uno now came alongside. But she was loaded to the water's edge and could hope to take off but a few of the soldiers on board the Belle.

What was more, she was herself exposed to the zone of fire from the bayou battery. Distant wild cheers attested to the exultation of the Confederates.

Matters looked dubious for the expedition. Certainly to be sunk in the waters of the bayou meant death and defeat.

"Looks bad, Clark," said Spicer as he met the boy tain.

"Yes! What shall we do?"

The little cavalryman looked about him sharply and said:

"We must land!"

"Where?"

This was the question. The shore occupied by the battery was the nearest. The other shores were nearly a mile distant and might be occupied by other masked batteries.

There was but little time in which to decide. Jack pointed to the shore just below the masked fort and said:

"That is our only hope!"

Spicer gave a start.

"We shall go right into their hands," he said. "That would not do. They could annihilate us while making the landing."

"Yet, it is our only hope. The Uno might keep off, and in case we are wiped out can make her escape. There is a chance that with a quick dash we can get to shore and storm the batteries."

"But—why attempt such a forlorn hope? Why not draw off and——"

Spicer glanced at the other shore. Jack bowed and said:

"You see! The Belle can never get there. She will be in the bottom of the bayou in less than twenty minutes."

The vibration of the flames in her hold could be felt. Already little tongues of fire were eating their way up through the seams of her deck.

In a very short space she must blow up and go down.

The gun crew were placing the last shell in the gun.

Jack Clark ran forward and seized the lanyard, crying:

"Let me sight her once! I believe I can locate the rascals!"

The gunner and his men stepped back. Jack quickly set the sight. He leveled the gun to the right of the point at which fire had been directed.

There was a powerful explosive shell in the breech. Jack pulled the lanyard.

There was a roar and a shock, and a volume of flame leaped from the muzzle of the gun.

The shell entered the green undergrowth and instantly there was a volcano burst of thunder and flame and into the air went smoke and debris.

A wild cry went up.

"You've hit their magazine. They'll have no powder! Now is our chance!"

The incident, though it had not stopped the fire of the battery, had given the defenders of the sinking steamer new hope. Jack Clark at once sprung to the bow and gave orders to the pilot.

The engines of the steamer had just ceased to work. But she was under some headway, and the pilot swung her head about so that she went head on toward the shore.

A moment later she struck just under the site of the battery. In an instant the plank was run out and the soldiers rushed ashore in a body.

It was fortunate that all the horses were on board the

Uno. The Belle careened a little just as the last man left her deck, seemed to give a shudder and blew up.

The fragments littered land and water. But only a glance at her shattered hull was all the Blues could give.

Jack Clark, sword in hand, was at their head.

"Forward, Blues!" he shouted. "Now is our time! Do or die!"

Before Spicer could get his men in line the Blues went up the hill through the underbrush with a rush.

The cheveux de frise was torn away. They crossed a trench and swarmed up towards the summit. A hot fire met them.

Musket balls rattled fast, and cannon shot tore over their heads. It required nerve to keep up at that moment.

Once the Blues wavered. But Jack and Hal, with wild entreaty and expostulation, brought them back. Every moment they drew nearer the battery.

It was the very wildness and daring of their dash that saved them. Up they went until they could see fierce faces behind the intrenchments.

The next moment, with one wild maddening cheer, they went over the breastwork. They were now hand to hand with the foe.

The advantage was with the Confederates. But courage and victory were with the Blues. Back from the guns they forced the defenders. One long ringing cheer told the tale.

Down came the Confederate colors. Up went the Stars and Stripes.

Spicer's men were now close behind as reinforcements. But the foe had fled, leaving dead and wounded behind.

No pursuit was organized for the moment, as it was not deemed feasible. The Blues were content to hold the guns they had captured.

The situation now was one that had not been anticipated by either Jack or Colonel Spicer.

With the destruction of the Prairie Belle the original plan of campaign was necessarily greatly changed.

The original intent had been to land at a place in the bayou known as Crosset's Point. From thence they could proceed by highway to Paducah or further south to Benton.

Just now they were in Kentucky, but the moment Grant's expedition against Fort Henry was started the campaign would revert to Tennessee.

A long consultation was held. The captains of the Uno and the Belle were present. It devolved upon Jack to finally furnish a plan of future operation.

"I propose," he said, "that we send the Uno with the horses on to Crosset's, there to wait for us. We will march around the bayou and rejoin our comrades there."

"Will you explain to me the advantage of such a move?" asked Spicer.

"Yes!" replied Jack. "In the first place, we cannot proceed on board the Uno and we have no other means of transportation. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"Very well! Our object in coming here is to wipe out Bridges and his gang."

"Just so!"

"Now, if we go direct to Crosset's, or, rather, if we were able to go there direct, we would run the chance of leaving him in our rear. In other words we might overshoot the mark."

Spicer's face lit up.

"I see your point," he cried. "You think that we will stand a good chance to run across Bridges in an overland march to Crosset's."

"That is my theory."

"Very good! I think your plan is a good one. But have you reflected that he might have the advantage of us?"

"How?"

"Not only numerically, but he knows the country, and his men are mounted."

"We shall be mounted when we get to Crosset's."

"But you count somewhat on meeting him before we get there?"

"Colonel Spicer," said Jack quietly, "you surprise me not a little, as you are a man of dash and reckless bravery. We have come here to seek Bridges. We are to find him under any conditions!"

"Captain Clark, I trust you will cast no aspersion on my motives."

"By no means. I only ask you to co-operate with me."

"I shall certainly do so!"

"Very good! Will you give the orders necessary to carry out this plan?"

"I will do so! What is more, Captain Clark, I shall make you and your company the advance guard or skirmish line of our force. Is that agreeable?"

"Highly so!" replied Jack. "My men will be much pleased."

"Captain Warden, as your steamer is lost, you and your crew may have quarters aboard the Uno. Captain Hood, you will take the Uno and proceed to Crosset's with the horses. You are to wait there."

"Very well, colonel!"

"We will move on at once," said Spicer. "It wants yet an hour of sunset. I think we may find our way out of this swamp before dark. Captain Clark, throw out your line at once in the advance."

Jack saluted and retired.

The guns captured were spiked and rolled into the bayou. The breastworks were demolished. Then the troops were ordered to advance.

Jack and his company of Blues deployed far in advance. They pushed on into the swamp.

As they felt their way along they came upon evidences of the flight of the Confederates.

Discarded muskets, canteens and haversacks were found. Also a dead or wounded soldier was discovered at intervals, all the usual accompaniments of a retreat.

Cautiously the Blues pushed on, carefully feeling their way as it were, for Jack Clark knew well the danger of an ambush or trap.

The shades of night were beginning to fall. What had been a most strenuous day for the Blues was coming to a close.

They had no regrets for the events of the day save the burning of the Prairie Belle. They had driven the foe after capturing their battery and were now cautiously pushing forward to find Bridges.

As Spicer had predicted, the chances of their getting out of the swamp before dark were to be made good.

Gradually the ground grew higher and the trees gave way to open country. Soon they emerged into the open.

It was too dark to see far or to discover what was before them. But in the gloom lights twinkled far away in the distance.

Jack studied these for a time reflectively. Lieutenant Martin approached him and asked:

"What do you think of it, Jack?"

"You have me!" replied the young captain. "I don't know really where we are. Those lights indicate a human habitation."

"That's right! It may be a farmer's house."

"Quite likely! It certainly is not the light of a camp fire or bivouac."

"Shall we go on further?"

"No!" said Jack decisively. "Order the lines drawn in. We will camp here!"

Jack had just received word from Spicer that he had bivouacked in the swamp and would go no further till daylight. So the boy captain decided to do the same.

The Blues soon had camp fires blazing.

Plenty of material was afforded by the rail fences nearby. The boys had rations allowed them when they left Cairo and these still held out.

They had no tents. The night was sharp and clear, and they might have suffered from the cold but for the generous army blankets with which Uncle Sam provided his soldiers.

With these to protect them the boys rolled themselves up and went to sleep on the ground. They were sufficiently tired to sleep soundly and well.

Pickets, of course, were established and soon all was quiet in the camp.

But Jack Clark was wakeful. The boy captain could not sleep.

Some strange prescience of impending evil was upon him. He could not shake it off, and it influenced him to adopt an unusual and daring move.

The distant lights had seemed to have more significance to Jack Clark than to anyone else.

He was strangely interested in them. He tried to reason out why they were there and what they were.

The more he thought upon the matter the more convinced he was that they did not belong to a habitation.

Some sort of a camp was established there. The camp fires of the Blues were in a hollow and could not be seen from that point. So it was likely that the distant campers knew nothing of the proximity of the Blues.

Hal and Jack strolled out to the edge of the little knoll beyond the camp and watched the lights.

Finally the young captain said:

"It's no use, Hal! I must know what it means."

"Shall I send a scout down that way?"

"No!"

"What do you propose to do?"

"I am going down there myself."

"You?" exclaimed Hal in surprise and alarm. "That is not wise, captain. Suppose you walked into a trap?"

"I shall look out for that. I have a disguise which I shall wear."

"Oh, if you insist upon going, I beg you to take me with you!"

Jack shook his head.

"That would never do," he said. "We cannot leave the Blues without an officer. Suppose they were attacked by surprise?"

"That is true," agreed Hal. "Well, I beg you not to go alone."

"Send Corporal Tom Peters to me."

A few moments later the jolly fat little corporal was saluting his captain.

"Tom," said Jack quietly, "I want you to accompany me on a little secret enterprise to-night. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the corporal.

"Very good! I want you to exchange your uniform for rough clothes. I think you can borrow some from one of the guides who brought us through the swamp."

"I can, captain. I will be ready whenever you say."

"Very good! Report to me as soon as you can on this spot."

"All right, sir."

"Wait! Keep a still tongue. It must not be known that we leave the camp."

"Yes, sir."

The corporal hurried away. It was not long before he returned dressed in rough jeans and boots, with a slouch hat. He carried a pistol and a knife for weapons.

Meanwhile Jack had dressed himself as an overseer of a Southern plantation. He wore a coarse woolen suit, boots and a slouch hat.

Thus equipped, or rather disguised, they approached the picket. The latter gave a start of surprise and presented the point of his bayonet.

"What are you doing inside the lines," he demanded suspiciously. "Give an account of yourself!"

The picket was about to give the signal for the guard, but just then Jack took off his hat and said:

"It's all right, Gordon! Mum is the word. Peters and I are going outside the lines. Remember, and say nothing!"

The picket saluted.

"All right, captain. I did not know you."

Jack and Peters passed out and soon were making their way down into the fields below. In the gloom they could barely see their way.

But finally they came to a lane, which led between rail fences toward the distant lights. These had now become plainer and Jack saw that his surmise was correct and that they were camp fires.

But the small number of them showed at once that the camp was only a small one. It might be a band of bushwhackers or possibly stragglers.

As Jack now drew nearer he was constrained to use much caution. The possibility of running into a guard was great.

But they drew gradually nearer and it became evident that there was no sentry posted.

Then they beheld a remarkable scene.

A fire of fence rails burned in a little hollow. There were three other fires and about them lounged soldiers in gray to the number of a score.

But in the light of this camp fire was a tall handsome young lieutenant. He wore a cloud of gloom upon his refined features. He strode up and down in an impatient and even anxious way.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISPATCH-BEARER.

Nearby in the light of the fire there sat a colored servant who seemed to be busy with the task of polishing a belt buckle.

"Hang it! I don't see why they don't come," said the young Confederate officer in sharp tones. "You are sure you delivered the message to the right man, are you, Cato?"

"Yes, sah! I done gib it to the gemmen wif de black beard an' de stoop shoulders. I done reckon he was Captain Darke hisself."

"He said he would be on hand at eight?"

"Jes' wha' he said, sah!"

"Humph! It is now long after nine. He is not very punctual. These dispatches must go on to General Johnson at the earliest moment. I can wait but a little longer."

"Marse Caverly, I done reckon yo' bettah hab a leetle ob dem sperrits fo' yo' nerves, sah!"

"No, no. I don't want liquor," replied the lieutenant hastily. "Confound this delay! It is all so important. General Johnson must know at once of this expedition of Grant's down the Tennessee. If he does not get the word at once he will be surprised and perhaps the Confederacy will suffer a great defeat."

"I done reckon dat would be no fault ob yours, Marse Caverly."

"That does not help the matter, Cato. We all know how dire is the extremity of the Confederacy at this moment. Something must be done within a week or Donelson and Fort Henry will fall."

"Fo' de Lor's sake, massa! De Ole Scratch could'n' take dem forts."

"Perhaps not! But, with the Yankees to help him, there is no telling what might happen. Ah, what is that?"

The young lieutenant drew himself up alert and eager. The clatter of horses' hoofs was heard.

The next moment out of the gloom into the firelight sprang a horse and rider.

The horse was black, though foam-streaked. The rider wore a black cloak. But he threw it off and leaped to the ground.

He was a remarkable specimen of a man as revealed in the firelight.

Lieutenant Caverly was fair and Saxon in temperament. His face had character and refinement.

The other was equally tall, equally distinguished, Apollo-like and handsome. But he was dark almost to swarthinness. There was a cruel curve in his mouth, a sleepy latent fire in his smouldering black eyes.

Jack Clark at once instinctively weighed each. He saw that one was noble and high in ideals, the other base and crafty, a veritable villain.

Ambrose Darke, lieutenant on the staff of Bushrod Johnson, was the dark officer who met Caverly with a cold salute. For a moment they faced each other.

"You sent for me?" said Darke in a formal manner.

"I did," replied Caverly impatiently. "I had hoped you would come sooner. I have been long delayed and must go on."

"What do you want?"

"I have important dispatches for General Johnson. I am bound on a mission further north, even to Cairo, if disguise will enable me to get there. I want you to deliver these dispatches for me to General Johnson at once."

Darke's lips curled in a smile.

"Are they so important?"

"They are."

"In what respect, pray?"

"They contain information of a new move upon Fort Henry by General Grant with twenty thousand men, and aided by Admiral Foote."

Darke gave a start. His lips curled.

"Probably a false rumor," he said. "How can you prove it reliable?"

"It is not for me to prove it to you, sir. I ask you again to relieve me of the duty of taking these dispatches to General Johnson so that I can go on to Cairo as a spy."

Darke's face clouded. There was a light of jealousy in his eyes.

"You are doing great things nowadays," he said sneeringly. "The Confederacy can hardly exist much longer without your advice and assistance."

Caverly quivered as if struck with the lash of a whip. His lips moved as if to make a hot answer, but he controlled himself and said:

"Once again, will you relieve me of this duty? Or shall I report your unwillingness to General Johnson?"

"Oh, I suppose I will," said Darke condescendingly, as he took the papers. "Look out you don't get your neck in a halter up there in Cairo."

Caverly made no reply to this, but turning spoke to the sergeant of the guard, who was standing near.

"Mount your men, sergeant. We must ride on at once!"

Instantly the men about the camp fires sprung up. Horses were led out of the gloom and saddles adjusted.

Darke, instead of mounting, lingered. Finally, in a taunting tone, he said:

"I say, Caverly, why didn't you stop at the house?"

The fair-haired lieutenant turned and for an instant his

hand was on his sword hilt. He looked haughtily at the other.

"You may best answer that question, sir," he said. "From my boyhood days Colonel Anderson, of Gray Manor, was my friend until you came and stood between us. Shall I tell you that I am no longer welcome at my old friend's home?"

"Treachery can only result in loss of friends."

"You lie!" exclaimed Caverly, half starting forward. Then he stopped and was silent. Darke only laughed.

"Lost your temper, didn't you, Caverly? I see why you have brought these dispatches here for me. You want to get me away from the Manor because she is there. You forget that I can return. Ah, shall I tell you all about her? She is a fiery little Yankee yet, but as bewitching as ever, and the old colonel swears by her. Here is something more: Who wins the good graces of Colonel Anderson wins the heart of Kate Lindley. Fair Kate, the most beautiful girl in all Kentucky or Tennessee either. Do you think you have any chance there, Caverly? Ha, ha, ha! Good-night, Caverly! Keep up the good fight. Go up to Cairo and get your neck in a halter. The Confederacy needs you, oh yes! But while you are making a hero of yourself, I am basking in the radiance of the smiles of the sweetest girl on earth."

Darke leaped into the saddle.

He dashed away into the gloom. For a moment Caverly stood looking after him with white set face.

Then he turned and hoarsely gave orders to his men.

All this Jack and Peters had listened to with interest. Much of it was comprehensive to Jack.

He knew that the Manor house or residence of Colonel Anderson must be near.

Caverly had been instructed to deliver his dispatches to Darke. He, however, would not go to the house to deliver them on account of a misunderstanding with Colonel Anderson.

It was not hard for Jack to guess why this was. Love, rivalry and jealousy were at the bottom of all.

The romance for a moment interested the boy captain of the Blues. Then he recalled another matter of far greater interest to him.

Caverly was playing the part of a spy and carrying important dispatches. It was necessary that the United States should interfere with his employment if possible.

In other words, Jack was determined to capture the young spy. But just how to do this was for a moment a question.

He and Peters could not hope to cope with the score of Confederate soldiers who were acting as a bodyguard to the young lieutenant.

Jack was thoughtful for a moment. Then an idea came to him.

"Peters," he said, "I believe there is work for us at present right in this vicinity. It is likely that this young lieutenant and his guard will go over the old Paducah road, which is over yonder. Return as quick as you can to camp. Get fifty men and head them off. Capture this young spy if you can."

Peters looked up in surprise.

"And you?"

"I will take a look about the plantation to see what Lieutenant Darke has done with those despatches he received."

"All right, sir," said the corporal. "I see your game. You are going to kill two birds with one stone."

"Yes, that is my game."

"All right, captain. I'll do my best. I'll get that young lieutenant at any cost."

Peters slipped away into the gloom. Jack Clark waited a moment until the cavalcade had ridden away. Then he slipped down into the road below.

It was along this road that Darke had ridden so fast.

Jack kept along at a rapid walk and soon saw a light ahead of him. There was no doubt in his mind that this was the light of the plantation house.

In a few moments he came to the great gateway, through which he passed and was in the grounds.

It was easy to follow the box-bordered walk and soon the porch of the grand old Southern Manor was before him.

Lights gleamed through the low windows of the house. On the porch there sat a number of people engaged in conversation.

Jack drew near a clump of shrubs. He was but a few feet from the piazza and could hear and see everything.

Nearer to him than anyone else sat a fine-looking old man who he soon learned was Colonel Anderson.

Beyond him sat Darke. The lieutenant was talking in jest and seemed to be in high spirits.

Just beyond him was a young woman, whose face Jack could not clearly see. But her voice was charming to hear.

That this was Kate Lindley he was sure. Beside her sat a sweet-faced old lady, Mrs. Anderson.

"Still partisan are you, Miss Lindley?" said Darke in a badgering tone. "Really you are rather hard on us poor Southerners."

"I make no distinction, Lieutenant Darke," she replied. "I have friends both North and South. I love them all. But I deprecate this war, which should never be."

"What else could the South do but fight?" said Darke in an argumentative way. "They have stood insult and abuse long enough."

"The South only asks her rights," said Colonel Anderson. "She does not want war."

"Yet she was the first to rush to arms," said Kate quietly.

"I deny that," cried the colonel hotly. But Mrs. Anderson interposed.

"William, don't lose your temper. Let us change the subject, Lieutenant Darke."

"Not until I have told you that we have set a trap for Grant that will place him in limbo in a week's time."

"The trap is not yet sprung?" asked Kate quietly.

"No, but it will be," said Darke with a peculiar intonation. "In the morning I ride away from here to see Bushrod Johnson. I carry important despatches which a courier brought me to-night."

"A courier brought you?" cried Colonel Anderson excitedly. "Did he come here?"

"Not to this house," replied Darke as he gradually worked his listeners up to the highest pitch of interest. "He would not come here. He sent a colored man here to ask me to meet him out by the turnpike."

"I recall the colored man," said Mrs. Anderson. "He was here but a short while ago."

"Just so!"

"Why would he not come here?" asked Colonel Anderson with curiosity. "Any honest friend of the South is safe at my house."

"Well—er—this fellow had a very good reason," drawled Darke. "He was known to you and he feared that he might be—that is to say—*persona non grata*."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Kate. "Uncle has no such feelings toward anyone."

"I hope not, my child," said the colonel warmly. "Why not tell us who this man is, Darke?"

"I am sure I have no reason for not doing so. Let me see? His name is Caverly. You know——"

"Lieutenant Caverly!" gasped Kate as she sprung up. "He is here—he——"

"No," said Darke coldly. "He has gone. I can tell you more. He will never return this way!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SWORD BOUT.

For an instant a dead silence reigned on the piazza.

The scene was a dramatic one. Kate Lindley stood like a statue facing the villain Darke, whose face wore a mocking smile. The young girl was ghastly pale.

"What do you mean?" she asked huskily. "He—will not return——"

"No," said Darke. "He has gone to Cairo as a spy. I happen to know that there is a trap waiting for him there, and that he will walk right into it, and a halter will be his portion at once."

A gasping cry escaped Kate.

"No, no," she gasped. "It must not be!"

She sank into a chair. Darke very coolly lit a cigarette.

"People who know say Caverly deserves his fate," said Darke calmly. "There are ugly rumors that he is——"

"That is false, Ambrose Darke!" cried the young Northern girl, as she leaped to her feet. "Lewis Caverly is too noble and brave to be guilty of any act unbecoming a gentleman. That I know, and no words of yours can traduce him in my eyes!"

"Tut, tut!" said Colonel Anderson in a testy way. "You are far too partial to Caverly, Miss Kate. He is not the god you would make him out!"

"I regret that I have brought his name up," said Darke with easy candor. "I had no idea that he had such a champion in this house. At the same time, I wonder at it!"

Kate Lindley's eyes burned with flame. She walked to the door to enter the house.

"Yes, he has a champion in this house and one who means to save him from this fate to which he has been sent."

"Kate," called the colonel sharply, "where are you going?"

"I am going to Cairo," she said grandly. "I am going to General Grant. I shall not see Lewis Caverly hanged."

"What?" roared the old colonel as he sprung up. "You are my ward. I forbid you to leave this house! I——"

"William," called Mrs. Anderson in a tone which checked him, "I don't want you to talk that way to Kate."

"But—she is just foolish enough to do what she threatens and——"

"Yes," said Kate with tense tones. "If you think I am going to see the life of an honest and true man sacrificed in this way you are mistaken. I am going to save Lewis Caverly if it is within human power!"

She swept into the house proudly. For a moment there was a scene.

"Bless my soul!" stuttered the colonel. "I—tut—tut—tut—er—think that girl is crazy!"

"You keep quiet, William," said Mrs. Anderson in a reproving way. "Let her alone. She will soon get over it."

"I regret that I brought up the subject," said Darke humbly.

"I am glad that you did," said the colonel, who was angry. "I don't like Kate's actions lately. She is too picksniffety altogether."

The colonel went stumping into the house. Darke turned and bowed to Mrs. Anderson.

"I apologize to you, madame, for having created this scene," he said, "but I could not refrain from acquainting your ward with the character of this man who has seemed to have gained such a hold upon her."

"I have always had a high opinion of Mr. Caverly," said Mrs. Anderson, "but if he is, as you say, a traitor to the Confederacy, I think that Kate had better drop him."

"I can assure you absolutely that he is such."

"I will talk with Kate," said Mrs. Anderson, rising. "I wish you good-night, Lieutenant Darke."

"Good-night."

The lieutenant lit a fresh cigarette. He stood by the steps a moment and then descended them.

He passed within touching distance of Jack Clark. The young captain stood silent and ready.

Darke did not see him, however, but passed on leisurely down the walk. Jack left the shrubbery and followed him.

Darke strolled on slowly as if in a deep reverie. He puffed the cigarette and finally came to a halt at the gate in the paling which skirted the highway.

They were now one hundred yards from the house.

Darke leaned over the paling and began a low toned soliloquy:

"Things are working all right," he muttered. "I'll soon have the upper hand. That young cub will be disposed of. The girl will be mine. Yes, by any means, fair or foul, she will be mine."

Jack Clark was but a few feet behind him. The young Union captain's mind was made up.

He knew that Darke bore important dispatches to Bushrod Johnson concerning the next movement of Grant. Those dispatches he must secure.

He was alone, but so also was Darke. Whether he was a match for him or not Jack did not know.

He had crept nearer, intending to make himself known and demand a surrender when a startling thing happened.

Down the walk came the clatter of horses' hoofs. Against the sky was outlined the figure of a rider.

It was that of a young girl.

Darke had sprung back from the paling. He uttered a cry of surprise and then acted with lightning quickness.

He flung himself forward and grasped the bridle rein of the horse. With a quick movement he threw the animal upon its haunches.

It nearly unseated the rider. She plied whip and spur, but in vain. He hung to the rein with power.

"Who are you?" she cried with spirit. "I demand that you release your hold upon my horse."

"Not until you tell me what mad expedition you are undertaking."

"Oh, it is you, Lieutenant Darke?" said Kate Lindley with anger and scorn. "How dare you intercept me?"

"I dare do anything to save you! Where are you going?"

"That is no affair of yours!"

"I shall make it so. But I know where you are going. You think to save the life of Caverly."

"I shall do so, even at the sacrifice of my own!"

"You are a fool, Kate! Give him up! I love you madly. He is false and I am true! Oh, listen——"

"Dare not insult me! Let me pass!"

"Never!" cried Darke in a tempest of passion. "I'll tame you, my beauty. You shall never defy me——"

He did not finish the sentence. Swift as a flash she dealt him a blow with the butt of her riding whip. It struck him in the head, and for a moment he reeled with its force.

He loosed his hold upon the bridle rein and the horse broke away madly and the next moment with its fair rider was out of sight.

Darke sprung up with an imprecation. But the fair rider was gone. For a moment he stood undecided how to act.

Then he turned and hissed:

"I'll overtake her. She shall be tamed if I have to raise heaven and earth to do it!"

But he came to a sudden startled halt. In his path stood a tall figure.

"One moment, my friend," said Jack Clark quietly.

"Who—who are you?"

"I am Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues," replied the young captain.

"A Yankee!" ejaculated Darke as his hand flew to his sword hilt. "What are you doing here? Have you——" he paused and swept a glance about him. "Have you men with you?"

"I am alone!" said Jack coldly.

"Alone!" ejaculated the villain with sudden reassurance.

"Are you not taking chances, Captain Clark? Do you know where you are?"

"I am on the Anderson plantation at the present moment. You have dispatches for General Bushrod Johnson on your person. I want those dispatches."

Darke was astounded.

"You do, eh?"

"I do!"

"How did you know that I have dispatches for General Johnson?" he asked in a searching way.

"I saw you receive them from Lieutenant Caverly."

"Perdition! You are a spy!"

"I am waiting! Turn those papers over to me at once. Then prepare to accompany me as a prisoner."

"Really," said Darke sneeringly, "I like your assurance, Captain Clark. Shall I tell you that it is you who are my prisoner? You are in our lines and cannot hope to escape."

"I know that to be false," said Jack coldly. "Come, I am waiting!"

Darke stepped back a trifle. In an instant he had unsheathed his sword.

"I shall defend myself," he said. "And I warn you that I am a good swordsman. It will cost you your life."

"I am content to let that decide the question," said Jack. "If you win I will surrender to you. If I win you will yield to me."

"Perforce," said Darke. "Take that!"

Jack had not unsheathed his sword when Darke made a treacherous lunge at him. But the young captain stepped nimbly aside.

"You coward!" he cried. "You shall pay for that!"

Swift as a flash of lightning, Jack's sword leaped from its sheath. He parried the next thrust of his antagonist and then their blades crossed.

In the gloom it was weird work. Neither could distinctly see the moves of the other.

Jack Clark was a superior swordsman. While at school in Berlin he had taken lessons of a fine master-at-arms. He had quickly learned all the tricks of the art.

The result was that Darke speedily found that he had met his master.

At first he had reckoned upon finding an easy vict. and his assurance was complete. But now, when he found that Jack was bearing him down, the natural cowardice of his nature asserted itself.

He suddenly threw up the point of his sword and cried:

"Enough! You are a fiend! I yield!"

"Ground your weapon!" said Jack, unwilling to trust the villain. For a moment Darke hesitated, then thrust the point of his sword into the ground, leaving it there quivering and bending.

Jack took the weapon and flung it far away. Then he held the point of his sword toward the villain and said:

"Precede me!"

Darke's voice shook as he said:

"See here! You have bested me. I will give you the dispatches, but you must let me go!"

"I decline those terms," said the young captain. "Your

surrender is unconditional. I insist that you accompany me!"

With a snarl of rage Darke turned and preceded his captor. Jack's sword point was at his back.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

Down to the highway they marched thus. It was the young captain's purpose to take his prisoner to the camp of the Blues.

The dispatches he had safely in his breast. It was, as he realized, a most important capture.

Along the highway they proceeded for some ways. Jack recalled that it was not far from this point that it was necessary to leave the highway and cut across country to reach the camp of the Blues.

He was a little puzzled to get his bearings and was endeavoring to overcome this difficulty when the sound of distant firing reached his ears.

There was a rapid fusillade of shots and distant yells. What it meant he did not know.

But suddenly upon the night air there rose the sound of flying hoofs. Out of the gloom burst a cavalcade of horsemen.

Jack had no time to get under cover. The party was upon him in an instant.

He was obliged to act with lightning quickness. He saw that the horsemen were Confederates and that there were fully a hundred of them.

They had half dashed by when the leader pulled up his horse and shouted:

"Halt! Who is that? Right wheel! Catch that fellow!"

Jack had no idea of being captured, and though it seemed hard indeed to lose his prisoner he realized that it was necessary to save himself.

So he did not hesitate.

He left Darke and vaulted the rail fence. On the other side was a growth of scrub oak. Into this he dashed.

Bullets followed him. Also he heard the sounds of pursuit. But he ran on at full speed for a long ways.

He was now satisfied that he had distanced pursuit. So he stopped and sank down to rest under the tree.

He was much chagrined at losing his prisoner. But in his pocket were the dispatches.

He would send them to General Grant, who must now be at Paducah. They would never reach Johnson.

Jack Clark did not realize fully the value of the captured papers. He never dreamed that their capture completely changed the plans of Grant, misled Johnson and resulted in the capture of Fort Henry.

He reckoned that it was after midnight. Where the camp of the Blues was he had no means of knowing.

He was anxious to get back before his absence was discovered. He tried in vain to locate a familiar land-mark.

It was impossible. The woods all looked alike.

But suddenly a sharp hail met him.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend," replied Jack at a venture.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Jack came nearer and said:

"Down the Ohio!"

It was the countersign of the Blues. For the moment he suspected the picket was a Confederate.

But the latter gave a sharp cry and said:

"Pass in, friend!"

In an instant Jack gave a sign of joy. He stepped eagerly forward.

"Hello, Jim Buxton! I'm glad to thus stumble upon our own picket. I've been trying to find you for an hour."

"Captain Clark!" exclaimed the picket, as he saluted. "You are back again."

"Yes. Have you seen Peters?"

"He is out now with a small detachment trying to capture some Confederates. I don't know which way he went."

"It's all right, Buxton," said Jack. "Then he has not returned?"

"No."

"Very good! I wish you good-night!"

"Good morning, sir."

"What? Is it so early as that?"

"It is nearly four o'clock. Daylight is at hand."

Jack hurried into the encampment. He came upon Hal Martin, who was sitting up rubbing his eyes.

The first lieutenant sprang up and saluted. He looked surprised.

"It is a relief to see you back, Captain," he said. "I lost myself in sleep and have just awakened."

"All right, lieutenant!" said Jack heartily. "I can say that my night's work has been profitable."

"I am glad to hear that," cried Hal with pleasure.

"Peters gave us an inkling of it all. He is out at present with a detachment."

"Then he has not yet returned?"

"No."

Jack looked anxious.

"I am sorry to hear that," he said, "for I fear that we are likely to be surrounded by a superior force. I ran across a company of Confederate cavalymen but an hour since."

And with this Jack detailed his experiences. Hal listened with deep interest.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "You certainly have done well, Jack. It looks to me as if the interception of those dispatches means a great deal."

"It does!" declared the young captain. "But I feel sure that we shall get into trouble if we remain here."

"Do you propose to fall back?"

"Temporarily until Spieer comes up. Then I shall propose that we turn our course further to the east, toward the course of the Tennessee."

"I believe you have the right of it, Jack. Grant and his gunboats will soon be steaming up that river. If we are to dispose of Bridges it ought to be done at once."

"If Peters was here now, I would send a courier to Spicer and then fall back."

"Do you think he will intercept the young officer, Caverly?"

"I hope so! But if he goes on to Paducah he will be captured anyway. I am interested in the little love affair and I could not bear to think of his being hanged and the breaking of that young girl's heart."

"I am interested myself," said Hal. "Hello! What's that?"

The distant hail of the picket was heard. In the early morning light a number of armed men were seen.

"It is Peters!" cried Jack as he recognized the fat little corporal. In an instant the latter was by his captain's side.

"Captain Clark," he cried excitedly, "I have tried to carry out your orders and have failed!"

"What? You did not get Caverly?"

"No, sir. He slipped by us in the darkness. Then a troop of Confederate horsemen opened fire upon us in the darkness. We were obliged to retire."

Jack was silent a moment.

"That is too bad," he said finally. "I am sorry he got away, for he is a spy. Ordinarily I would not care so much, for I know that he will be captured at Paducah. But there is another reason."

And the young captain thought of Kate Lindley and her brave mission. He felt, however, that he was powerless.

But other matters of an exceedingly pressing nature now claimed his attention. A report came into camp that a large body of Confederates were advancing from the north.

It was evident that they were no part of Bridges' command, for they were neatly equipped and had none of the guerrilla aspect.

Jack, after careful reflection, hit upon what he believed to be the truth, and this was that they were volunteer regiments on their way to reinforce the garrison of Fort Henry.

In that case it would be fatal to give them battle.

The expedition of Spicer and the Blues would be revealed and perhaps thwarted. Jack decided to fall back.

So the order was given and silently and in good order the Blues dropped back. They wended their way through the undergrowth until the uniforms of Spicer's men were seen.

The Union colonel was quite amazed to see the Blues falling back. He called a halt and went forward to see what it meant.

Jack quickly explained matters to him. Spicer listened with interest.

"You have done well," he said. "Certainly it would be folly to court death by such an attack. We will let these regiments pass. Then my plan is to go on to Crosset's Point and get our horses before doing anything else."

"I believe the same!" agreed Jack. "We can strike a harder blow and get away quicker if we do that."

"That settles it. As soon as the foe have passed we will order a march to the south and make for Crosset's."

A temporary bivouac was made. It was two hours before the Confederate columns had passed.

Then quickly an advance was ordered. The Union troops

digressed to the south and went on rapidly. For several hours they floundered on through the undergrowth and raced across fields and through lanes.

Suddenly an arm of the lagoon burst into view. Some ramshackle buildings and a wharf were seen.

This was called Crosset's Point, a landing place for the small steamers that plied in the bayous.

Even at this distance the uniforms of the Union guard could be seen, showing that the Uno had arrived with her freight. The Stars and Stripes were waving at the wharf.

"There they are!" cried Hal Martin. "Come on, boys! Let them know we have come through all right!"

With a ringing cheer the boys swung their caps. They were heard by those on the wharf and the answer came back.

The little steamer after landing her freight had gone back. It was fortunate that no Confederate guerrillas had chanced to pay Crosset's a visit.

So that the horses were safe. In less time than it takes to tell it the two detachments, the Blues and Spicer's company, were at the wharf and had claimed their mounts.

All was now ready for a daring dash after the foe, which Colonel Spicer had decided to make.

Just at that moment a Union scout came in with a thrilling report. A band of guerrillas, presumably Bridges' men, were but five miles away engaged in the delightful pastime of burning a small village which the Union advance might occupy to advantage.

The report gave the Blues a thrill. It had aroused their fighting spirit and they were eager to meet the foe.

Spicer at first was disposed to view the project with caution. He feared a trap, but finally gave the order to advance.

The village was known as Smith's Ford, and it was situated on the banks of a small creek. Its destruction that day by Bridges' men was final, for it never rose from the ashes. Like many another hamlet in the zone of the war, it was extinguished for all time.

The Blues deployed to the right and Spicer's men to the left.

Mounted and thoroughly equipped for their great dash, they rode on. Soon the long columns of smoke were seen, and then distant shots were heard.

The Blues mounted an eminence, and from this they saw the whole scene. The village was burning, and Bridges' men, fully a thousand strong, were riding away.

CHAPTER VI.

REPORTING TO GENERAL GRANT.

The guerrillas were riding straight toward the Blues. Jack saw his chance for an ambush.

Instantly he divided his company, and they ensconced themselves in thickets on either side of the highway along which the Confederates must ride.

Spicer meanwhile was swinging his column around to strike Bridges in the rear. It looked bad for the Confederates.

On came the guerrillas. They were a motley crew. All rode fine horses, and showed dash and daring.

But they wore nondescript uniforms. Their hair and beards were unkempt. Some carried a brace of chickens on their saddle pommel. Others had saddle bags stuffed with captured spoils.

Altogether they had made a successful raid. But they did not dream of the deadly trap into which they were riding.

Not until a shot by one of Jack Clark's men emptied a saddle did they suspect anything.

Then Jack sprung up and gave the order:

"Fire! Give it to them!"

A terrific volley from the Blues swept their ranks. Men fell and horses bolted and the mounted column was thrown into confusion. In vain their officers tried to rally them.

Jack Clark believed that it was the proper moment to act. Quick as a flash he saw the chance and cried:

"Ready, Blues! Draw sabres! Charge!"

With a wild cheer the Blues spurred their horses ahead. They burst upon the disorganized Confederates like a whirlwind.

There was a terrific impact, fierce flashing of sabres and cracking of pistols. The Confederate column was bent back and seemed on the point of breaking.

Jack Clark's hope was to break it and divide it. He believed that he could force the Confederates to throw down their arms.

But, though taken by surprise, the Confederates seemed suddenly to rally and stand firm.

The Blues came to a stop. There was a surging of the gray horsemen into the gap and then the Blues rebounded like a wave from a rock.

Jack saw that the attack was a failure and repulse would follow. He swerved his horse, and the Blue riders swept en echelon past the right flank of the column.

In an instant they had cleared themselves of the melee and were off like a flash over the brow of the hill.

Here they wheeled and dismounted. Under cover of the height of lands they reopened fire upon the foe.

The Confederate guerrillas had quickly reformed and were ready for fight. They started for the position of the Blues.

But at this moment the sound of horses' hoofs in their rear caused them to change their plans. Spicer's men were coming up like a cloud to overwhelm them.

Bridges himself could be seen upon a black horse urging his men to a counter attack. The guerrillas swept about, ignoring the Blues, and rode to meet Spicer.

The astute Union colonel had no idea of meeting such a superior force on an open field. He deployed his men instantly and dismounted them, forming a long line of battle.

Shots were fired into the close ranks of the guerrillas. They went on under the leadership of Bridges for several hundred yards.

Then they suddenly swerved and panic seemed to seize them. It was the moment for action.

With a wild cheer Spicer's men were in the saddle. The Blues came sweeping down on the other flank.

The guerrillas broke and fled. Bridges could not check them.

Jack Clark saw the Confederate general and shouted to his men:

"Ride him down! Capture him!"

The Blues, like a whirlwind, swept down and cut off the little body of men who had rallied around Bridges. There was no recourse for them. They were compelled to surrender.

In a few moments they were disarmed and the proud distinction of having captured the Confederate guerrilla chief belonged to Jack Clark and his Blues.

The rest of the guerrillas made a running fight of miles with Spicer's men and finally escaped in the swamp.

But certainly the great object of the expedition had been gained.

Bridges was captured and his band scattered. It was a joyous time for the Blues when they bivouacked that night.

Bridges, the sly fox of the Western Confederate Army, took his capture coolly. He shook hands with Jack and Spicer and said:

"You caught me this time, boys. I shall look for an exchange and the next time you will be the birds in the net."

"I suppose if you had captured us," said Jack, "you would have hung us."

The guerrilla chief smiled.

"Wait and see," he said.

That night they bivouacked on the spot. The next morning a consultation was held.

"I have a plan to submit," said Jack Clark quietly.

"What is it?" asked Spicer.

"We have carried out General Grant's commission. He will be pleased to know that Bridges is a prisoner.

"Now I propose that you, with your company and the Blues, will start for Benton. Wait there for me!"

"And you—where are you going?"

"To Paducah to intercept General Grant. I will take Bridges along with a report of the fight. I will then ask General Grant for further orders."

"But—this assault on Fort Henry!"

"You may be sure it will take place," said Jack.

"How far is it to Fort Henry?"

"Ninety miles from Paducah."

"That is a long distance. How does he propose to transport his forces?"

"By flat boat up the Tennessee."

"The deuce! He practically controls the Tennessee now."

"Never, until Fort Henry is taken."

"He cannot take it."

"Don't you believe it, sir. It will be taken within thirty-six hours."

Spicer was reflective a moment.

"Look here!" he said with a sudden inspiration. "Why

is it not a good plan for me to march on to the Tennessee and intercept the flat boats there."

"It is a good plan," agreed Jack, "unless General Grant gives us other orders."

"Ah, there you are! I think, on the whole, we had better make camp near here and wait for your return."

"It is not a bad idea. I shall return at the earliest possible moment."

"Very well!"

Plans were quickly laid. The Blues were left in charge of First Lieutenant Hal Martin. A small squad under Peters was delegated as a guard for Jack and his prisoner.

Perhaps Jack Clark might not have thought so much of reporting to General Grant in person had it not been for the recollection of the young girl Kate Lindley and the plight of her Southern boy lover.

He was deeply interested in these young people and was anxious so far as he was able to right their wrongs.

So Spicer made camp in a favorable spot to wait for Jack's return from Paducah.

It was not long before the boy captain, with his body guard and the prisoner Bridges, was on the way to Paducah.

General Grant's troops aboard transports had left Cairo and arrived safely at the mouth of the Tennessee.

Admiral Foote's gunboats were ready to lead the way up the Tennessee. Monday night, the third of February, they anchored at Paducah.

It was Jack's opportunity to see General Grant, who, with his staff, had come ashore and was at a hotel in the town.

The young captain was detained by the city guard, and his prisoner was turned over to them. He was then allowed to report to General Grant.

In due time he found his way into the presence of the great general, who received him warmly.

"Well, Clark," he said, "what news do you bring?"

"I think good news, sir. I have brought you Bridges, alive and lively."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Grant with a show of delight. "You have captured him, and so soon?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"In charge of the city guard, sir."

"Very good! I will order him sent to general headquarters at Cairo. Captain Clark, I shall be pleased to mention you for promotion——"

"Thank you, general. I ask only to remain with my company."

General Grant looked at Jack with interest.

"As you please," he said in his terse way. "What else have you to report?"

"Some captured dispatches, sir. The bearer made his escape."

Jack laid the intercepted dispatches upon the table. General Grant glanced over them eagerly.

"Clark, these are of the utmost importance," he said. "It gives me just the information I have sought. You say the bearer escaped?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know him?"

"Captain Ambrose Darke, of Johnson's staff."

"Ah! I know him well for a scoundrel. I am sorry that he escaped."

General Grant, with a wave of his hand, seemed about to dismiss Jack. But the young captain coughed slightly and said:

"Pardon me, general, but I would like to ask you a question."

The general turned and looked with critical surprise at Jack.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I want to inquire if you know or have ever heard of a young Confederate officer named Caverly?"

General Grant gave a start.

"Oh, he is a spy!" he said. "He was arrested to-day and is under guard!"

Jack's voice had a thrill in it.

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Give him the formality of a trial in the morning and hang him!"

"My soul! Hang him?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, general, I beg that you will commute his sentence. I happen to know the truth about him. He is no spy. I know it!"

General Grant's face hardened. There was a strange glint in his eyes as he said softly:

"You know this?"

"I do, sir."

"He is a Confederate officer and the incriminating evidence was found upon him!"

"He is a Confederate, but not a spy. He is the victim of a dark plot. Believe me, general, I know this to be true. I beg you to listen for a mighty wrong will be done. A dark scheme is afoot to send Caverly to his death."

There was a strange light in Grant's eyes as he said:

"How do you chance to know so much about this man?"

Jack paused a moment. The question was so unexpected that he hardly knew what to say. But he finally rejoined:

"I chanced to overhear the plot. I also know that Ambrose Darke, who is Caverly's rival in love, is at the bottom of it all. And, what is more, I can say——"

Jack never finished the sentence. An unexpected thing happened.

CHAPTER VII.

PLEADING FOR A LIFE.

The sound of excited voices was heard outside the room door. Then an orderly appeared and said:

"General Grant, a young woman is outside who persists in seeing you. We do not like to handle her rudely. What shall we do?"

Grant hesitated. A sudden/startling thought came to Jack. Even in that moment the general said:

"Show her in!"

The orderly disappeared, and in a moment a young woman, pale and beautiful, appeared in the door.

Jack gave a sharp exclamation:

"Kate Lindley!"

It was the planter's ward. She stood erect and like a beautiful statue, while her flashing eyes transfigured Jack.

General Grant, without a change of expression, stood looking coldly at his fair visitor. While no one could accuse the great commander of a lack of chivalry, yet he was a man of war and stern as was demanded of him.

"Is this General Grant?" asked the young woman with a ring of firmness in her voice.

"I am General Grant."

"I am Kate Lindley, the ward of Colonel William Anderson, of Gray Manor."

"Very good! I am a plain soldier, Miss Lindley. What have you to ask of me?"

"That which you would be inhuman not to grant—a human life!"

The general's face grew more stern.

It was not hard for him to guess now the young girl's meaning. It was only one petition of many which were brought to him every day.

"I understand," he said. "I am sorry to refuse you in advance!"

"I am not asking the favor, general. As a daughter of the North and loyal to the Union, I demand it!"

There was spirit in her voice and manner. The general shrugged his shoulders coldly and said:

"Orderly, show the lady out."

"I refuse to go," she retarded hotly, while a red spot glowed on each cheek. "I have come here upon a desperate mission and no insult will force me to abandon it!"

"My dear young lady," said General Grant in a firm tone. "If you have come to intercede for a brother, a lover or a father—aye, even all of these—I am powerless to aid you. Military justice must not be thwarted."

It is only justice that I ask," said the young girl earnestly. "General Grant, you must listen to me. Through the machinations of a villain an innocent life hangs in the balance. If you give the order to take that life you are a murderer in the sight of heaven and you shall pay for it."

Her words and her earnest manner so deeply impressed the general that his face softened a trifle.

"I am compelled to take the course I do," said the general in a more kindly tone. "This is a time of war, and only stern discipline will avail to enforce military law. Many lives are unjustly taken, but that cannot be avoided. Will you tell me who this person is for whom you would intercede?"

"His name is Lewis Caverly."

"Caverly, the spy?" The general's face hardened greatly. He grew cold again.

"He is no spy! That is a false charge!" cried Kate with fierce energy. "He is the innocent victim of a plot. A dark

villain has tried to send him to his death. His name is Ambrose Darke!"

The general was a sphinx. He seemed not to heed the impassioned words of the young girl for some time.

Suddenly he turned and asked:

"What is Lewis Caverly to you?"

The young girl hesitated a moment and then made reply:

"He is my betrothed husband!"

General Grant nodded. It was to him the same old story of a young girl interceding for her lover. Mothers came to him in behalf of their sons, and fathers on the same errand. Many of the cases were pitiful and such as to win the sympathy of an ordinary person. But the general of an army must not yield to sentiment.

"I am sorry for you, Miss Lindley," he said. "But I cannot save your lover. He has transgressed the laws of military life and must pay the penalty."

The young girl drew a sharp quick breath. Her manner changed at once. She saw that her course toward General Grant was not winning its way. So her manner changed.

"I beg you to be merciful in this case," she pleaded. "He is not guilty. He is too noble and honest to lend himself to such a profession as that of spy. He is the victim of a villain. Oh, I beg you to be merciful, as you hope God to be merciful to you. Spare Lewis Caverly!"

"It is beyond my power," said General Grant. "I am sorry for you, Miss Lindley. Your sweetheart is undoubtedly a spy. He must meet the fate of such, hard as it may seem. In any case I could not give him his freedom, for he is a Confederate soldier and a prisoner of war!"

"I do not ask for his freedom," said Kate earnestly. "I know that he is a prisoner of war. I ask for no more than that he shall be treated as such. But spare his life."

General Grant did not reply for some time. He grew deeply reflective, and drawing a note book from his pocket scanned it.

All this while the others stood silently by. General Grant paced up and down. Suddenly he turned to the orderly:

"Show the lady out," he said. "Miss Lindley, I am sorry to terminate this interview, but others are waiting for an audience with me. I can only give you a ray of hope. I shall investigate the case of Lewis Caverly, and if I find that there is good reason to believe him innocent I shall recommend him to the clemency of the military court. More than this I cannot at present promise."

Kate Lindley took a step nearer.

"I am not satisfied," she said. "He is sentenced to die to-morrow morning. Will you give me his reprieve?"

"No."

She staggered back with a gasping cry of pain. Jack caught her in his arms just as she was about to fall. She recovered quickly, however.

"Williams," said the general, angrily, to the orderly, "under no circumstances allow another woman to enter my presence. These sort of scenes are getting upon my nerves. Take her away."

Kate started up with wildly flashing eyes.

"General Grant," she cried, "for the last time I ask you

for justice for the man I love. He is a Confederate soldier, I know, for he is a Southerner and true to the faith of his country, for which he cannot be condemned. If you send him to his death you commit a crime. I have been a loyal daughter of the North. I have already applied to our sanitary commission for a position as nurse. In every way I have sought to assist and further the interests of the Union. But I shall feel that my sentiments are misplaced and that you men of the North are devoid of humanity, and henceforth I will renounce my creed and go over to the other side. Hang Lewis Caverly and my life shall be consecrated to the cause of the Confederacy."

General Grant seemed not to heed her words. He had turned to his table and was busy with his maps.

Jack Clark stepped forward and offered his arm to Miss Lindley. At the same moment he said in an undertone:

"Pardon me, Miss Lindley, but I think it is well for you to go. Believe me that nothing can be gained by remaining here longer. If you will trust matters to me I will try to aid you all I can. Perhaps the general may relent yet."

"I thank you, Captain Clark," she said huskily. "I never would have believed that a Union general could be so devoid of human charity."

"Do not say that, Miss Lindley."

Jack accompanied her past the orderly and into the corridor outside. She seemed very weak, and he asked:

"Shall I not attend you? Are you stopping at any place in the town?"

"I am with a maiden aunt at a house in another part of the town," she said. "A carriage is waiting for me outside."

Jack accompanied her to the carriage door. She was still weak, and placing a hand on his arm she said:

"Oh, Captain Clark, I believe you are a true man. I am in much distress of mind. I need counsel and cheer. Will you not kindly accompany me to my door?"

"I will, Miss Lindley," said Jack as he entered the carriage. The driver whipped up his horses.

In the gloom of the carriage Jack could not see her face. But, as she talked, he felt that she was calmer.

"Captain Clark, what would you advise me to do?" she asked. "I cannot stand it to think of Lewis Caverly being hung on a charge of which he is innocent."

"Really, Miss Lindley, I can only advise you to wait and trust in Providence."

"I never believed before that General Grant was unjust."

"Nor is he, I feel sure. He is a man of few words and taciturn ways. But underneath I know that there is a great heart and a world of sentiment."

"I wish I were sure of that! It will change my life if Lewis is hanged. I shall at once enter the Confederate service as a female spy."

"Miss Lindley! I am astonished!"

"I mean it! I have a very dear school friend in Virginia—a Miss Prentiss—who has done great work in Washington. She will help me!"

Jack gave an inarticulate cry.

"Nellie Prentiss!" he exclaimed. "Do you know her?"

"An old school friend. She is very dear to me. She is the daughter of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, of Richmond."

"And the sister of Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays," cried Jack.

"Yes, and it just comes to me that she has spoken to me so often of a certain Jack Clark. Can it be you?"

Jack nodded in reply.

"It is true," he said with a tinge of sadness in his voice.

"Ah, Miss Lindley, this war has broken many ties and divided many hearts. Will Prentiss was my school friend in Fairdale. He was a Virginian and went home to give his services to the South. We were friends then, but foes now. Miss Nellie Prentiss was a dear friend."

Kate was silent for a few moments. It was a silence which to both seemed sacred. She knew instinctively the heart of the young Union officer beside her. She was the friend of sweet Nellie Prentiss and she knew how deeply these two young people cared for each other and how hard the breaking of the tie must have been.

Her voice was soft as she said finally:

"You will not give up hope, Captain Clark. I know that Nellie Prentiss will never forget you. It may be that the war will divide you for a time. But—when the war is over——"

"Yes," said Jack in a low tone, "that is my one star of hope, Miss Lindley. When the war is over——"

"Then human hearts will beat once more together, a kindred spirit will rise from the ashes and love and life once more reign in the land."

"Amen!" said Jack reverently. "Ah, Miss Lindley, it is a hard test."

"I know it," she replied. "The man I love is a Confederate. I cannot marry him, knowing that he is a foe to my country. But I cannot see him go to his death charged with a crime of which he is innocent."

"You are right, Miss Lindley. But do not give up hope. Something will turn up. That sentence of death shall never be executed if I can help it, I assure you."

"I thank you, Captain Clark. Your words give me great cheer!"

Jack left her at the door of the house where she was stopping. Then he returned to the hotel with all haste.

As he entered an orderly stepped up, and saluting asked:

"Are you not Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues?"

"I am," replied Jack.

"I have been requested by General Grant to direct you to wait upon him at once."

Jack was not a little surprised, as well as puzzled. But he went at once to the general's room.

The great commander still sat at his desk scanning maps and papers. He looked up after awhile and yawned.

"Ah, Clark, it's you, is it?"

"I have come in response to your summons," said the young captain.

"Very good, sir," said General Grant.

CHAPTER VIII.

OFF FOR FORT HENRY.

The great commander swung about in his chair and scanned Jack's face.

"Clark, you did well in capturing Bridges. Where is your company at present?"

"Near a place known as Smith's Ford, in the Tennessee Valley."

"Is Spicer still in command?"

"He is, sir."

"You think the country is free of Confederates down that way?"

"I do not, sir."

"Ah, the deuce! I thought with Bridges disposed of all would be clear."

"Not so, sir. There are plenty of others down there, sir."

"Humph! To-morrow morning our gunboats start up the Tennessee to attack Fort Henry. Admiral Foote will advance up the river and shell the fort. General Smith will make a land attack on the western shore of the river. General McClernand will cut around to the east and capture the military road between Forts Henry and Donelson to prevent a retreat or any reinforcements. Do you see?"

"Yes, sir."

"All this you are to keep to yourself. Now I am going to send your and Spicer's companies in advance as a scouting party. I want to march to the mouth of Muddy Creek, which will be a short distance for you from your present position. I will send a gunboat this hour to meet you and carry you sixty miles up the river. You will disembark ten or twelve miles this side of Fort Henry. Land on the Tennessee shore and scout eastward to the military road. Clear everything before you. By the time this is done our gunboats will be on hand. It will be morning and the attack to be made."

"I shall follow out your instructions to the letter," replied Jack. "But, to save time, had I not better go up the river with the gunboat?"

"Yes," replied Grant. "You will find her all ready at the levee with all steam up. I will send an orderly with you."

In that moment no other thought than that of his great enterprise was in Jack's mind.

He was about to leave the room when General Grant said:

"One moment, Clark!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are familiar with this affair between Caverly and Darke, the two young Confederate officers?"

Jack gasped in surprise.

"I am, sir."

"In your opinion Caverly is no spy, and guilty of nothing worse than the carrying of dispatches?"

"That is all, sir."

"Take this to the sergeant of the prisoners' guard. Tell

him to see that this order is carefully executed. Do not fail!"

Jack took the written paper given him by the general. A great lump was in his throat as he left the room.

He believed that the paper was a written order for the execution of the unfortunate Caverly. That he should be the bearer seemed painful indeed.

But duty demanded obedience, and Jack was not the one to shirk. He found the way to the sergeant and gave him the order.

"Eh, what's this?" exclaimed that officer as he read the missive. "Bless my soul, this is unexpected. I have a file of men all ready to march the prisoner out?"

"Caverly?"

"Yes."

"I suppose the order requires you to shoot him?"

"No," replied the sergeant. "Read it for yourself."

Jack glanced at the order and his heart gave a wild leap, while moisture filled his eyes.

It was tersely written and characteristic of the great general whose career had only just begun. Thus it read:

"Headquarters Army of the West, Paducah, Ky.

"Upon receipt of this order detail a guard of men and march Lewis Caverly safely outside our lines, having first secured his parole to never again take up arms against the United States.

"(Signed) U. S. GRANT, General Commanding."

For a moment Jack was silent. He read the order and handed it back to the sergeant.

"When Caverly's parole is signed I would like to see him," he said.

A few moments later the prisoner had taken his oath and was released. He was met by Jack at the door of the guard house.

"Caverly," said the young captain, "I congratulate you upon your escape from death."

"Thank you," replied the young officer, looking Jack square in the eye. "You have the advantage of me."

"I am Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. I captured Ambrose Darke, though he escaped me, and I know the whole story of his plot against you. The young woman to whom you owe your life and who is responsible for the present favorable turn in your affairs is at present in this town, and while she does not know of your good fortune is praying for your release."

Caverly's face whitened and his voice was husky as he exclaimed:

"Kate Lindley!"

"Yes," said Jack quietly. "I am ordered away from here at once. But I shall have just time to take you to her before I go."

"Heaven be praised!" said the young officer in an undertone. Then he grasped Jack's hand.

"Oh, I cannot express to you in words my gratitude. Be assured I shall never forget you, for you have made of me the happiest man in the world."

"I am pleased to render you any service in my power," said Jack. "I hope yet to capture that scoundrel Darke!"

Caverly trembled with excitement.

"It will not be well for us to meet," he said hoarsely. "I shall kill him."

Caverly left the guard house with Jack, and they were soon on their way to the residence of Kate's aunt. When they ascended the steps and rang the bell the door opened and on the threshold stood Kate Lindley, pale and beautiful.

She did not see Caverly at once. When she saw Jack she exclaimed:

"Oh, Captain Clark! I hope you have brought me good news——"

Then she paused. A great cry of amazement and joy pealed from her lips.

"Lewis, it is you!"

"Yes, Kate."

Jack waited for no more. Before the two lovers had fairly concluded their greeting he was gone.

The young captain of the Blues started for the levee. He found Corporal Peters and his guard of Blues there.

The gunboat Fairfax had steam up, according to Grant's orders, transmitted through Admiral Foote. Jack and his companions went aboard and she steamed away.

Soon she was in the mouth of the Tennessee and stemming its current. Behind hardly an hour came the rest of the fleet.

It was not far from daybreak when the Fairfax hove to off the mouth of Muddy Creek.

Tom Peters, mounted on the best horse the party had, was put ashore and sped away rapidly on his mission to the camp of the Blues and Spicer's men.

It was several hours before the gallant company of Blues was seen riding down the bottom lands to the river. Behind was Spicer and his men.

Admiral Foote's squadron passed while they were embarking. His transports landed a few miles below.

But the soldiers did not advance to the attack that day. This gave the Blues and their companions a chance to cross the river into Tennessee.

The great movement on Fort Henry was under way. History records that it was a brilliant victory for the Union arms.

Just what part the Blues took in it we have yet to see.

When the Blues were landed and Spicer's men were also drawn up in column on the Tennessee shore cheers were given the gunboat's crew. Then the party rode away upon their scouting expedition.

General Grant could not have planned a better enterprise than this scouting expedition toward the military road between Forts Donelson and Henry.

It had a great moral effect upon the garrison of Fort Henry and was largely responsible for their consequent surrender.

The Blues rode in advance of the heavier body of cavalry. Hal Martin, who was delighted at the return of his young captain, said:

"I am glad that we are on the move, Jack. It was irksome waiting there. It looks as if we should have plenty to do now."

"Indeed we shall," agreed Jack.

"So you saved Caverly's life."

"Yes."

"I am glad, for it would have been too bad for that young woman. She set her heart by that fellow."

"So she did," agreed Jack. "But Darke is at large. Perhaps he may try some more villainous game."

"That is true. I couldn't help but think how few of his stripe lose their lives on the battlefield. It is always the straightforward man we can ill afford to lose."

"That is a lamentable fact," agreed Jack.

The Blues rode on slowly, for rain had begun to fall and the roads had grown miry and almost impassable.

It was the beginning of that great storm which delayed Grant's men and had prevented their taking part in the attack on Fort Henry. A fact which was much lamented by his troops at that time, but which they later made up for at Fort Donelson.

Floundering in the mire and facing a driving gale of rain and wind, progress was slow for the Blues. But the fifteen miles to the line of communication between the two forts was finally covered.

The advance line of the Blues suddenly met the fire of a vidette. At once they pushed forward and drove the sharpshooters toward Fort Henry.

As they rode down the road pursuing the vidette they met with a sudden startling surprise. This was in the shape of a volley of musket balls, which emptied several saddles, and for a moment threw the command into confusion.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE MILITARY ROAD.

Jack Clark acted with great coolness, as well as celerity. He swung his company into a deep or sunken lane between two lines of rail fence.

This lane extended at right angles with the military road so that from either side the Blues could enfilade it with their volleys. The contest waxed hot.

The foe were concealed by a growth of willow and sycamore beyond the line of the road.

For a time the bullets tore up the rain-soaked ground and there seemed to be no advantage gained by either side.

Finally Spicer's men moved around to the north to turn the flank of the foe. This drove them from their cover.

They were seen to be four companies of a regiment. Doubtless they were on their way to reinforce Fort Henry.

What was more, far beyond down the road could be seen the canvas tops of supply wagons. It was plain that a train of supplies was being sent over from Donelson.

Jack Clark felt a thrill.

To capture this would certainly be a creditable achievement. He rode back to confer with Colonel Spicer.

"Grand!" cried that officer. "Certainly we will capture the train if possible. I think we can do it, too."

"What is your plan?"

"I will send a hundred men around in the fog there to cut them off in the rear."

"Capital! I suggest that you send the Blues on that job."

"It's a bargain. Do you want the job?"

"I will take it!"

"It is yours."

It did not take Jack long to get his men into line for the new project. They dashed away into the fog.

With a wide circuit the Blues swept on over the rolling ground. Finally they galloped down upon the road out of the fog.

They were now in the rear of the supply train. So near were they to Fort Donelson that the bugle could be heard.

The supply train was defended in its rear by only a handful of men. The evident belief had been entertained that the Yankees could not get around so quick.

Jack lost no time.

He ordered the attack upon the supply train instantly. The Blues, with a cheer, dashed forward.

What followed was confusion. Blue and gray were mixed in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. The Blue triumphed from weight of numbers.

The Gray was swept back, the little post-guard was cleared away before them and the Blues were among the wagons. The drivers leaped down and ran for their lives. It was a hollow victory.

Meanwhile Spicer had doubled the four Confederate regiments up and had them on the run. The military road was for the moment in Union hands.

A plucky old Confederate, with hatchet face and tufted beard, was captured. Jack tried to get information from him. But he would only retort:

"Wait till ye git under ther guns of Fort Henry. May the Lord hev mercy on ye!"

"See here, my man," said Jack in an aggressive way, "I want the truth now! How is Fort Henry defended?"

"Ten thousand men!" declared Colonel Bates, for that was his name. "They'll sally and wipe you all out like sniffing a candle. You'll see!"

"Humph!" exclaimed the boy captain. "That looks easy on paper! But you'll find, my friend, that Fort Henry will be captured before twenty-four hours."

"I don't believe it," said the old Confederate.

The supply train was now reached by the victorious attacking party. Jack sent the Blues down the road and rounded up all the wagons.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were captured and then the contents were overhauled. As there was no way to get away with the spoils, it was ordered that they be destroyed.

So a fire was built under the wagons, and they were soon in a blaze. Thus the entire train was destroyed.

As it was but a few miles in either direction to Forts Henry and Donelson, it was to be expected that reinforcements would be sent and a repulse would be in order.

Even as the last wagon was fired the distant glitter of bayonets in the fog was seen. Jack met Colonel Spicer, who cried:

"Ought we not to back out of here before it is too late?"

"We will draw back at once," said Jack. "I will order the retreat sounded."

This was done, and in a few moments the entire company of Blues and Spicer's men as well fell back across the road and toward the place where they had landed on the banks of the Tennessee.

They were none too soon. Gray uniforms were seen in every direction but the north. The lines of a formidable force were converging upon them.

The attack upon their lines of communication, however, had affected the Confederates in just the manner that Grant had designed.

It had drawn their attention from the fleet and the river front. All this while on the other side of the Tennessee Grant's army was pushing on.

But Admiral Foote's gunboats were already in position to attack the fort. Shells were flying already in the fierce bombardment.

So hotly did the foe press forward to overwhelm the Blues and their comrades that the retreat became a hasty one. When the river bank was reached, however, Jack ordered a stand. The advantage of position was his and the Confederates were held in check.

They tried to drive the Union invaders into the river. But the stubborn resistance caused them to finally abandon the attempt.

So that soon the Blues were left alone, and for the first time in hours had a breathing spell.

"Well," cried Hal Martin, as he shook the water from his drenched clothes, "we stopped them, didn't we, Jack?"

"We did!" agreed the young captain. "And now I'm in doubt whether to pursue them or not."

"They seem to be falling back."

"Yes, doubtless it is an order to retire to the forts, as the attack there seems to be general."

This was true. The mortar boats were hurling shells into the works of Fort Henry and the great naval battle was in progress.

How Admiral Foote shelled the fort until it was completely riddled and the colors were hauled down is told in the pages of history.

It rained in torrents as the Blues waited on the banks of the Tennessee only twelve miles from Fort Henry. But the long expected orders suddenly came.

Jack received the dispatch from General Grant, which was brought by an orderly and read as follows:

"Captain Clark: You may report at once on the west bank of the Tennessee. Let Spicer march down on the east bank as far as he finds it safe. I want your company for scout duty in front of our columns. I believe that General

Floyd has planned a rear attack with several thousand of his men, who are on their way to Fort Henry from Benton. I hope to be apprised of this in time to arrange a repulse. Report to me instantly, as I am about to order an advance in conjunction with Foote.

“(Signed) U. S. GRANT.”

Jack at once conveyed this message to Spicer, who nodded and said:

“Well, that means that we are to part company, pard. However, I wish you good luck and hope to see you again soon.”

“I hope so, Spicer,” replied Jack. “Until then, good-bye!”

Jack at once ordered his men into line. They were taken across the river in a flat boat and then marched into the Union camp.

They were received with cheers by the other soldiers. Their brave deeds had won them easy recognition.

The Union columns were in ready marching order. General Grant was ready for the land assault upon Fort Henry.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have been on hand to participate in it. But before he got there a miniature battle was fought by the troops on their line of march.

And such a line of march! None who took part in it ever forgot it. The rain had made the clayey soil sticky and heavy.

The brave soldiers pushed on against such a handicap with heroism. They floundered in the mud and exhausted themselves utterly until near the hour of noon, when a halt was called.

They were now but a few miles from Fort Henry, and the distant thunder of Admiral Foote's guns could be heard.

General Grant was as cool and calm as was his wont. No one could say truthfully that he was not anxious to be on hand to co-operate with the fleet in the attack on the fort.

But this was not to be. However, there was work done by those disappointed troops which had its effect all the same upon the capture of the fort.

For when the Confederate generals, Floyd, Pillow and Buckner, learned that the Union forces were coming they had sent far and near for reinforcements to concentrate at Fort Henry.

As a result the country was overrun with marching bodies of the foe. And in one case at least the fate of Grant's column might have been settled had it not been for the astute work of Jack Clark and his Fairdale Blues.

It will be recalled that Jack and his boys had been sum-

moned by General Grant from the east bank of the Tennessee to do scout duty in front of his columns.

The Blues had deployed with skill to the south, several other companies taking the route along the river. What Grant feared more than aught else was a possible flanking attack from a body of several thousand men who were marching from the vicinity of Benton to relieve Fort Henry.

It was this body of the foe that Jack Clark and his boys were particularly to look after.

When the halt of the advancing columns was called it was on an arm of the great river and within sound of the guns of Fort Henry.

Just beyond this inward sweep of the river was an elevation. The Union troops had halted in a sort of wooded bottom land. It was necessary to make the circuit of this inland arm of the river and mount this elevation to reach the outposts of the fort.

Jack Clark and the Blues had been pushing on far ahead to the south. They had engaged several small outposts and had driven them in.

Suddenly Hal Martin came riding through the scrub and shouted excitedly to Jack:

“I say! We must get word to General Grant at once. The foe are advancing upon his flank. With a glass you may see them from yonder hill. It looks as if there were thousands of them.”

Jack was astounded.

“Where do they come from?” he cried. “What does it mean?”

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTURE OF FORT HENRY.

“Come with me and I will show you,” declared Hal. “They may be easily seen from yonder hill.”

Jack lost no time. He accompanied Hal to the summit of the little hill. With his glass he saw distant gleam of arms and the color of gray uniforms.

The fog had lifted and the day was clearing. There was nothing to deceive the eye.

“It is the foe!” exclaimed Jack. “They are swinging around to flank Grant. We must send him word at once.”

“Why not double back as quick as possible? We are not needed here longer. We may be able to do some skirmishing if we can get in front of the foe.”

“That arm of the river is between us. If we try to make the detour we shall run into the arms of the foe.”

This was seen to be true. For a few moments Jack was aghast. It looked really as if he was powerless to aid or avert the possible catastrophe.

He could see the advantage of the Confederates' position. If they should hit the Union forces unexpectedly in their present position they might hurl them into the river, and if not annihilate at least severely cripple them.

This must be averted. Jack saw that it was up to him and his men to do this. He quickly made up his mind how to act.

"There is only one thing to do," he said. "We must find boats and cut across the river and carry the warning to Grant."

"Boats!" exclaimed Hal. "I doubt if there are a dozen within miles of this place."

"Nevertheless, we must in some way carry the warning."

This was clear enough. Jack gave quick orders to his men.

They came in from their position on the double-quick and at once the rapid march to the river was made.

When they arrived there, though, its powerful current brought them to a halt. Here was a barrier which could not be easily surmounted.

Jack Clark paused a moment in dismay. Then he spied a negro cabin far down in the reeds near the shore.

Without a word he ran down to it. There was every evidence that its owners had fled and left their worldly possessions behind them.

But in the rushes by the water's edge was a boat and oars. Jack did not hesitate a moment.

"Lieutenant Martin," he cried, "I shall leave you in command. Give me four men to row the boat. I will endeavor to find a flat boat on the other side to bring you across."

Then Jack sprung into the boat with his men and was quickly on his way across the river.

It was necessary to proceed some distance up the river to reach the point where the Union army was resting.

A clump of trees by the waterside was the spot where General Grant had his position. Toward this Jack ordered his men to row.

They drove the light boat through the water swiftly. As they made their way up the river it was necessary to pass under the brow of the eminence which commanded the Union position.

Even as the young captain of the Blues urged his boys to greater exertion over the brow of this eminence there appeared the flash of bayonets. The foe had closed in rapidly and were bound to cut off the advance of the Union forces.

An attack was imminent. As yet General Grant knew nothing of the proximity of the foe.

"Pull, boys, pull!" cried the young captain anxiously. "We are almost in range. They will open fire upon us if we don't hurry!"

The boys bent to the oars and the boat flew on. It met the current and was driven through it until finally the keel grated in the mud of the shore.

Jack sprung out and ran up the bank. As he did so he saw General Grant and the officers of his staff standing just in the verge of the clump of trees. The general turned, and seeing Jack coming started forward with a cigar in his mouth.

Jack Clark dashed up to the spot where stood General Grant. Lifting his cap he pointed to the river and shouted:

"We are attacked, general! The Confederates are upon us!"

With a grim expression upon his face General Grant heard the news. But not for a moment did he lose self-control.

"Bring me my horse!" he called sharply to an orderly. Then to Jack he said:

"Where are your men, Clark?"

"Across the river!"

"From what point are the foes advancing?"

"They have gained the heights over there, sir. They are trying to flank you. At present they are between you and Fort Henry."

"Go back to your men," said the general. "Skirmish toward the foe on that side of the river, but take care not to get into their clutches."

General Grant sprung upon his horse. And now there was displayed that quality of the born general which could evolve victory from defeat.

Like magic the situation changed.

The Union forces but a moment before at such a disadvantage moved in such a way as to, change completely the position of the attacking Confederates and even place them at a disadvantage.

A long column of Grant's men deployed westward and began to encircle the position of the Confederates, who now, it was easy to see, did not number more than two thousand men.

This force opposed to the twenty thousand under Grant's command could not be expected to hold their ground.

There was a short, sharp conflict and they were driven back toward Fort Henry. In the depths of a swamp they managed to make their escape.

But it was admitted that had they attacked the Union forces in the way of a surprise there would have been much

loss of life and a desperate battle before they could have been repulsed.

So Captain Clark and his Blues were entitled to full credit for the work they had done.

The troops now pushed on again toward Fort Henry.

The outposts were driven in, and after a while they came in sight of the outworks of the fort.

But even as they did so the heavy firing of Foote's squadron had ceased and distant wild cheering was heard.

Then the Confederate flag on the fort was seen to sink and rapidly in its place rose the Stars and Stripes.

Grant's men were bitterly disappointed that the fleet should have got ahead of them and have captured the fort.

But it was a Union victory all the same, and they cheered with the rest. It was now in order to rest and wait for the chance to enter the fort.

An hour later they marched in and took possession. The deadly work of Foote's guns could be seen on all hands.

The Confederates had made a desperate resistance. They had fought until their guns were dismounted and there was no hope left for them.

Then they had taken advantage of the failure of Grant's column to arrive and had marched out of the fort and away to Fort Donelson by means of the military road.

If this could have been held when it was captured by the Blues and Spicer's men the escape of the foe would have been an impossibility.

However, the fort was captured and Grant's troops were installed in it. The fleet of Admiral Foote rested in the river.

Thus was Fort Henry captured and the first step taken in that long and hard campaign in Tennessee which resulted, as history will tell, in the downfall of the Confederacy in the West.

Plans were now laid for the capture of Fort Donelson. Public sentiment was high in the Confederacy.

The Confederate generals in command at Fort Henry were roundly scored. There was much surprise and not a little consternation that the seemingly impregnable fort had fallen.

Now all eyes were turned upon Fort Donelson as the next point of attack. It was certain that General Grant would advance as soon as possible upon this stronghold of the enemy.

As a result the Confederate leaders hastened to reinforce this point and to make it as strong as possible.

That night in Fort Henry was one of celebration by the victors. The bands played martial music and the Boys in Blue rested upon their arms after their long and hard march and sharp fighting.

But General Grant, inscrutable and non-committal as ever, was seated in his tent conferring with his brother officers, Generals McClernand and Smith.

Rest was something which the indefatigable general did not permit himself to enjoy. He knew how necessary it was to keep ever on the alert, ever ready for the foe.

Captain Jack Clark and his Blues were within the fort and awaiting orders. The command of Colonel Spicer was still doing guard duty along the banks of the river below the fort.

Jack was engaged in writing letters to his parents in the East when an orderly appeared before him.

"General Grant wants to see you at once," he said.

Jack sprung up instantly. He wondered what it could mean, but guessed easily that some new plan was on the tapis. What this could be he was at a loss to conceive.

But he was ready for anything new, no matter how hazardous or difficult. He made his way to General Grant's tent.

In a few moments he stood before the great commander. Generals McClernand and Smith were also present.

"Ah, Clark," said General Grant glancing at him. "Have a chair."

Jack seated himself.

The general was busy a few moments examining some papers. When he spoke again it was not to address Jack, but the two generals.

"Well, McClernand, I see no way but to send a small detachment up the river and head Bushnell off."

"I think it a good plan," replied McClernand. "My information may not be of the most reliable sort."

"I would give a good deal to get that scoundrel in a trap. He is the worst guerrilla in the West."

"So he is!" put in General Smith. "He captured six wagons of my supplies and my men would have suffered but for a raid on the farmers."

"Bushnell must be caught," said General Grant. "I believe it cannot be done except by strategy. To chase him with an armed force would be futile beyond any doubt."

"He is as slippery as a weasel," said McClernand. "His men are peers in the saddle. They are all dead shots and know the country like a book. It is almost impossible to corner them in this swampy region."

CHAPTER XI.

ON AN EXCITING MISSION.

General McClernand was right, as Jack well knew. It was no easy matter to capture Bushnell, the guerrilla and raider.

He had been a thorn in the flesh to General Grant during the entire campaign. The great commander had placed a price upon his head.

"There is only one way," said General Grant, chewing his half-burned cigar. "If he is to be at Wardwell's to-morrow night to see Kate Wardwell, who is his sweetheart, I think the best plan is to pick out two or three men of nerve and strategic skill and send them down there to capture him."

"Whew!" exclaimed McClernand, "that is no easy task. The man who does that must take his life in his hands."

"It is one of the chances of war," said General Smith. "I think you will find a man to do it."

General Grant, without turning his head, said:

"Do you hear that, Clark? Could you undertake to capture Bushnell?"

Jack's veins tingled. He had guessed that this was the task required of him from the first.

He hastened to reply:

"I understand exactly what you want, sir, and I am pleased to accept the commission. I will not fail!"

The promptness and confidence of the reply gave the three military commanders a start. General Grant exchanged glances with the others.

"Do you realize the full risk of the undertaking?" he asked.

"I think I do!"

"It is required of you to practically place your head in the lion's mouth. In order to reach Bushnell you will have to be as shrewd as a fox, as alert as a deer and as keen as a weasel. He is surrounded at all times by a body guard which is composed of sharp-witted men.

"We have information that he frequently visits the home of the woman he intends to marry at Wardwell's plantation, some ~~about~~ ^{led} ~~about~~ ^{led} miles up the river. To-morrow night, it is presumed, he will visit at the Wardwell place. He has been known to go there unattended. It may be easy for you to trap him there. But the chances are that he will be surrounded by his body guard. If so you must outwit them, and that is not easy."

"I have a few questions to ask," said Jack.

"Well?"

"What sort of a looking man is Bushnell?"

"Heavy set and wears a red beard," said General McClernand. "He is a typical land pirate, with a heavy voice and a bullying way."

"I think I will know him. Where is Wardwell's place?"

"Twenty miles up the river near a place called White Rock."

Jack arose and said:

"Do you require anything further of me, General Grant?"

"Are you ready to undertake the job, Clark?" asked the general.

"I am, sir."

"Very good! I advise you to take but a few trusted men with you. If you take your whole company scouts will warn the guerrillas of your approach. After that you might as well look for a needle in a haystack."

"I understand, sir. I will follow your advice."

"Very good! Report to me at the earliest possible moment." General Grant turned to his table and resumed his papers in the coolest manner possible.

Jack left the tent. He was thrilled with the importance of his mission and the fact that it was a dangerous one. He was determined to execute it safely if possible.

He quickly rejoined his company in the barracks which had been assigned them in the fort. Jack called Hal Martin and his second lieutenant, Walter Gray, also Tom Pete and Sergeant Joe Ward into his tent. Then he told them of his mission. see

It is needless to say that they listened with deep interest. "Bushnell must be captured," Jack declared. "It is the best chance, and I mean to get him. I shall not return without him."

"Good for you, captain," cried Tom Peters. "If you'll let me go with you——"

"And me!" cried Joe Ward, while both Hal and Walter put in the same plea. But Jack laughed.

"I can't take you all," he said. "The Blues can't be left without officers. I think until I return that I will promote you captain, Walter. I will name Corporal Peters, Lieutenant Martin and Sergeant Ward to accompany me. As no move will be made for a week yet by our forces, it is likely that the Blues will have a rest."

So it was settled.

Horses were brought out and the quartet mounted and rode away from Fort Henry. They struck at once into the highway which led up the river.

The distance to White Rock was twenty miles. The roads had dried somewhat since the heavy rain, and they were now more passable.

The four young officers rode on for a ways without caution. Then, as they got beyond the Union outposts, they proceeded with less haste.

Foote had not yet started on that sweeping voyage up the Tennessee which did more than anything else to bring the people to a sense of loyalty.

The country was bleak and the air chill, bespeaking win-

ter weather, for the month was February. Twenty miles is soon covered by fleet horses, but it was dusk when they drew rein on a little eminence in sight of the village of White Rock.

Wardwell's plantation, as Jack had been told, was some few miles nearer the Tennessee river and on a series of flats or bottom lands noted for their richness.

A road turning west led toward it. This road for a ways led through timber.

Into this road they now turned and rode on cautiously. In the dusk it was not easy to see what was ahead.

But when they had covered what seemed like a distance of two miles Jack drew rein.

He reined his horse into the timber. The others did the same.

"I think we will do well now to go on without our horses," he said. "We will corral them here."

"I think it is a good plan," agreed Hal. "When we want them we can return for them."

had "Just so! I think we cannot be far from Wardwell's no ho."

TE Exactly! We must proceed henceforth with care." colu It did not take them long now to hobble the horses. Then t: they crept out into the road.

They had not proceeded a hundred yards when the wisdom of their plan was proven. The clatter of hoofs was heard.

They had just time to shrink into the shadows when three horsemen went galloping by. In the gloom it was impossible to tell who they were.

When they had passed the four Union scouts emerged from the bushes and went on. Every possible degree of caution was used.

It was not long before the trees grew less. Gradually the country opened before them.

It was plain that they were drawing nearer the river, as there was a palpable mist in the air. That Wardwell's place was not far away they felt sure.

Cautiously the four Union scouts now crept on. For aught they knew foes might be already closing in upon them.

The cunning sagacity of Bushnell's men was well known. To hunt them down meant all the strategy and woodcraft of the Indian.

Jack was in advance and going slowly. Suddenly Hal caught his arm.

"Sh!" he whispered. "Look yonder!"

In an instant all four dropped to the earth. They were not a moment too soon. A stalwart figure had appeared in the roadway before them.

This figure stood a moment statue-like, as if listening. The glint of starlight on his gun barrel showed that he was a sentry.

Not a muscle quivered among the quartette of watchers. They waited, it seemed, an age before the giant sentinel changed his gun and turned to walk away.

Then, swift as a flash, Jack was upon his feet.

Hal reached forward to restrain him, but he was too late.

The boy captain, swift and silent as a shadow, darted forward. He made not the slightest sound as he came up behind the huge sentry.

Suddenly the sentry turned his head. A half gurgling cry escaped his lips. But he was too late.

Like a panther Jack was upon his back, his fingers twined about his windpipe. The giant clutched at him, tried to break the hold and swayed across the road.

It is well known that one's strength cannot last long when one's throat is closed. It requires but a few seconds to bring the strongest man to his knees.

The result was the giant sentry came down with a crash. Jack hung to him like a leech.

His companions, seeing his purpose, rushed to his aid.

The result was quick and sure. Many hands held the giant down, though he was now unconscious. A gag was fastened in his mouth and he was quickly bound.

"Drag him into the bushes," whispered Jack. "The way is clear!"

The big sentinel was deposited in the bushes by the road. Then the four Union officers drew a deep breath.

A beginning was made. But what was beyond they could only guess.

There might be another line of sentries. Doubtless there was. They might not be so easily disposed of.

But the way was clear for the moment. Jack crept forward, the others following. Then he came to a stop.

Voices were heard and the tramp of feet. The words were distinguished:

"Hang you for a thief, Cutler! You took that bottle, and you know you did!"

"I don't drink whiskey, Bill! You'll have to lay it to Big Dave!"

"If I find out that he took it I'll have his hide!" growled the other. "I'm as dry as a fish, an' spittin' cotton. I want a drink of whiskey the worst way!"

"Wall, I'm sorry, Bill! If you'll give me a Mexican dollar I'll git you four quarts!"

"That's a bargain! Whar'll ye git it?"

"Down to ther levee. I know Black Jim an' he has a private still of his own."

"Let's go down thar!"

"Wait a bit! I think we'd better find out whar the general is fust."

"Oh, he's in ther house sparkin' his gal. It's all right. Big Bill is guard down ther road an' ther coast is clear. We won't be gone half an hour."

"Thet's right! Come on!"

The two hulking figures of the guerrillas passed near enough to our adventurers to touch them. But discovery did not result.

They receded from sight and hearing toward the river. The four young Union officers were deeply thrilled.

They had every reason now to believe that the coast was clear.

Doubtless these three guerrillas were all the body guard that Bushnell had brought with him. That he was in the Wardwell house there was no doubt.

The outlines of the big plantation house could be dimly seen. A light flashed from a window. Otherwise there was no sign of life about the place.

Even the dogs, the usual habitants of a plantation yard, were missing. The four scouts crept toward the house.

Suddenly Jack gave a start.

A stooping figure seemed to rise in his path. In an instant he covered it with his pistol.

"Move a step and you're a dead man," he said hoarsely.

The unknown sank upon his knees and began to whine piteously:

"Fo' de Lor's sake. I'se only jes' a po' ole cullud man. I ain' do nobuddy no harm. Doan' kill dis chile!"

Jack smothered a laugh in his utter relief that it was not one of the guerrillas he had hit upon.

He leaned over and pulled the black man to his feet.

"Get up, Cato!" he said. "Don't be a fool. Don't you know friends?"

The darkey gave an exclamation of delight.

"May de Lor bless yo', honey! Yo' is de po' cullud man's friends! Yo' is de Yankees fo' suah! Bless de Lor?"

"All right, Cato!" said Jack sharply. "Now I want you to help us!"

"Bress yo' heart, honey! I'se done glad fo' to do dat!"

"All right, Cato!"

"Wha' kin I do?"

"You belong to this plantation?"

"Yes. I'se old Marse Wardwell's boy!"

"Good! Who is in the house just now?"

The negro hesitated. He was a faithful servant and under ordinary circumstances would have said nothing to this question.

But the colored people were all convinced that the Yankees had come to give them freedom and work their eternal salvation for them. So he yielded:

"Dere ain' much of nobuddy, sah, but ole Marse Wardwell an' Miss Wardwell an' Chloe, de cook, an' leetle Jim, de kitchen boy, an'—an—I done fink dat——"

"Well, what?"

The darkey hesitated and stammered and seemed loath to reply. But Jack placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Out with it, Cato! Isn't Bushnell, the guerrilla, in there?"

"Ya, ya, he am, sah!" chattered the old negro. "Oh, fo' de Lor's sakes, don't yo' say I tole you."

"Have no fear, Cato! Now I want you to help us. We are here to capture Bushnell. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah!"

"Very good! Now I want you to go into the house and tell him that there is a friend outside who wants to see him. Tell him"—and Jack spoke at a venture—"that Lieutenant Ambrose Darke, of the Confederate Army, wants to see him."

The old darkey gave a sudden start.

"Fo' de Lor's sake, massa! Does yo' mean dat? How kin yo' say dat?"

"What do you mean?" asked Jack in surprise.

"Mah soul! Don' yo' know, sah, Marse Darke, he am in de house now, sah!"

"Ambrose Darke in the house?" ejaculated Jack in amazement. "Why, you black scoundrel, why didn't you name him in the first place?"

"Massy sakes alibe, massa, I did'n' hab no time!" protested the coon. "Yo' don' wait fo' me to speak. Massa Darke he am stoppin' here wif Massa Wardwell, an' yo' kin bet dat if Massa Bushnell find it out dere would be trouble."

"Oh," said Jack in surprise. "Then Bushnell and Darke do not agree?"

"No, sah! I done reckon dey don't."

"How long has Darke been here?"

"Fo' a few days, I reckon. He am heah fo' to settle mat-tahs wif Miss Wardwell. If she done marry Bushnell, den Darke he sell Marse Wardwell out, fo' he hab de mortgage on dis ere plantation. If she marry Darke, den ole Bushnell he come down yere wif his gorillas an' burn up de hull plantation."

In spite of themselves the four young Union officers had to laugh. Cato's version of the affair was comical.

"Well, that is a pretty hard situation for Miss Wardwell," said Jack. "Does she like either one of them?"

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE CAMPAIGN.

"I doan' believe she do!" replied the old negro. "But yo' see, whicheber way yo' put it, she am got to do somefin'. Ole Marse Wardwell, he doan' keer so long as his plantation am not taken away from him."

"The old scoundrel hasn't much regard for his daughter, has he?" said Hal in a contemptuous tone.

"I should say not!" put in Tom Peters. "I should think the girl ought to decide that matter for herself!"

"Well, dat am de way ob it," said old Cato. "Yo' kin put it any way yo' please. I done reckon she favor Marse Darke a leetle, fo' he am de bes' lookin'."

"Darke has certainly changed his tastes a bit since he made desperate love to Kate Lindley," said Hal.

"I should say so!"

"Cato," said Jack with sudden inspiration, "just go in the house and tell Mr. Wardwell that a neighbor is out here and wants to see him."

The darkey scratched his wool.

"Does yo' mean dat, massa?"

"I do!"

"A'right, sah!"

The coon vanished. Hal put a hand on Jack's arm.

"What is the game!" he asked.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes!"

"You ought to guess it. When Mr. Wardwell appears we will make a prisoner of him. Then we will lay the matter before him, and if he is the right sort he will be glad to deliver both of these scoundrels into our hands!"

The plan instantly caught the others.

"Capital!" cried Hal. "Nothing could be better. Can we trust the negro?"

"I think so. But in the meantime we can be on our guard. Let us draw nearer to the house."

They went up almost to the porch. Inside the house the notes of a woman's voice singing to the accompaniment of a piano could be heard.

The voice was a bit harsh and strident and indicated lack of cultivation. Jack had never seen Miss Wardwell, but he at once jumped at the conclusion that she was not a cultivated woman. Very likely either of her lovers would have been to her taste.

But just then out of the house strode a burly figure. Down from the porch it strode. A moment more and Jack had thrust a pistol into the planter's face and said:

"One whimper and you're a dead man!"

"Thunder!" gasped Wardwell. "Who are you?"

"Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues."

"A Yankee?"

"Yes!"

"Whew! How did you git in hyar? Whar's the guard?"

"We have disposed of them, just as we will dispose of you if you make an outcry."

"I'm dumb! What do ye want of me, Yanks? I'm a non-combatant!"

"We don't want you!"

"What do ye want, then?"

"We want two men who are in your house at the present moment."

"Jerusha! You mean Darke an' Bushnell, don't ye?"

"Yes."

"Wall, if ye'll agree to hang both of 'em, I'll turn 'em inter yer hands!"

"That's the kind of talk. I understand they are suitors for your daughter's hand."

"Yas, an', hang me, but I'd rather see her dead an' covered up. Melindy ain't any too good to her old dad, but I don't want to see her married to sech a villain as either one of 'em."

"Exactly, Mr. Wardwell! Now, if you mean business, just follow our directions."

"I'll do it, you bet!"

"Go back into the house. Cato tells me that Bushnell knows nothing of Darke's presence here. That if he did there would be a duel between them."

"Thet's right, thar would!"

"Very good. Now go in and see Bushnell. Send him out here to see a comrade. Do you see?"

"Yas!"

"Then send Darke out on the same errand. Let them meet out here. We will take care of them after that."

The planter hesitated.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "'Spose you didn't succeed? What would happen to me after that?"

"Don't fear!" said Jack reassuringly. "You need have no fear. We will see that they do not escape!"

"All right," said the planter slowly.

"Wait a moment, Wardwell," said Jack sternly. "Remember that treachery will be fatal to you. This place is surrounded. None of you can escape!"

"I'll do it!" said the planter dodging hurriedly into the house.

Hal placed a hand on Jack's arm.

"See here, pard," he said curiously, "what is your game? Why not send for one at a time to come out?"

"I want to see them meet," said Jack grimly. "I want

to see this fellow Darke get a good trouncing, which he will be sure to get from Bushnell. I know well what a coward he is."

"But if Bushnell kills him——"

"It will spare him the fate of the gallows, that's all. Bushnell is the man we really want—not Darke."

Jack remembered well the villainy of Darke in the affair at Anderson's plantation when Lewis Caverly was nearly sent to his death.

With interest all awaited the outcome of the affair. Heavy steps were heard and suddenly out upon the porch stepped a heavy figure. It was the guerrilla chief.

Bushnell was a giant in build, a typical bull-necked ruffian. He paused and looked about him in the gloom.

"Who wants to see me?" he growled. "What's all this business? Whar's Hogan? On duty thar?"

He roared out the command just as a tall dark figure stepped out upon the porch. Darke would have started back, but the planter, who was behind them, flashed his lantern into the faces of both.

The two sworn foes and rivals were face to face.

For a moment it was a thrilling tableau. Then Darke dropped an invective and grasped his sword hilt.

"Treachery! You've betrayed me, Wardwell. I'll kill you for that!"

"Oho!" growled the ruffian before him as he planted his figure before the door. "No, you won't kill him. At least not until ye've killed me. Wardwell never did me a greater favor! So ye've been hidin' in this house all ther while, eh? Jerusha! This is the best moment of my life!"

The guerrilla's sword flashed out on the instant. It was of the heavy cavalry type, while Darke's was a lighter blade.

Darke seemed for a moment indisposed to accept the situation. He crouched back like a hunted fox.

But there was no evading the issue. The burly figure had him cornered. With a snarling cry he whipped out his sword.

"Look to yourself," he hissed.

"Ye kin bet I will!" cried Bushnell as he brought his heavy sabre on guard. "When I see a pizen snake in my path I allus kill it. That's what I consider you!"

"Take that!" hissed Darke lunging at the guerrilla. The blade just grazed the big man's chest.

With a roar he swung his heavy blade over and narrowly missed decapitating Darke. Then the contest waxed hot.

Fiercely they fought and for a time it was hard to tell which had the advantage. The planter in the doorway held the lantern aloft, looking eagerly at them.

Behind him appeared the pale and coarsely handsome

face of his daughter, who was really the prize for which they were fighting.

Back and forth, round and round upon the broad porch they moved, parrying and thrusting without any visible advantage on either side.

But suddenly, with a bull like rush, Bushnell carried Darke back to the edge of the porch and over he went.

This saved him from the thrust of the guerrilla. Darke rolled over at the feet of the four young Union officers.

Bushnell was down in an instant and doubtless would have finished his man then and there, but Jack, quick as a flash, thrust a pistol into his face:

"Hands up!" he cried sternly. "Another move and you're a dead man!"

Astounded beyond measure the guerrilla chief made a move as if to brush the weapon away. But in the lantern light he caught the gleam of Jack's eye and the whiteness of his face.

"Fiends!" he gasped. "Who are you? Hogan! Whar are ye, confound ye! What's all this mean?"

"It means that you are a prisoner," said Jack coldly. "Your race is run!"

"Who are ye?"

"Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues."

Hal and the others had already secured Darke. He was quickly bound.

Bushnell was a wild and reckless man. Jack had half expected him to make a desperate resistance.

But, whether it was the hypnotic glare in the young captain's eye or the fact that the guerrilla chief could see that all hope was gone, it was not easy to say, but he surrendered.

In a moment his hands were securely bound and he was a prisoner.

The planter and his daughter, it is easy to assume, were only too glad at the result of the affair.

In a few moments Jack and his companions had secured their horses, and tying their prisoners to their saddles had set out on the return to Fort Henry.

Once away from Wardwell's they gave free rein to their horses.

Only once did they encounter anything like danger of capture on their return. Just as they reached the White Rock road horsemen dashed from a side road before them.

They were Confederates, and had they seen the Union riders all would have been up.

But in the dense gloom they actually passed them by unseen.

It is hardly necessary to say that our young scouts were delighted at their close escape.

They put spurs to their horses now and rode on madly.

The prisoners were mounted on horses taken from Wardwell's stable. Mile after mile sped by under their hoofs.

It was in the early morning hours that they were hailed by the first Union picket.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends!" cried Jack as he rode forward and gave the countersign. The picket accepted it and they rode on.

Into the fort they rode, and in a few moments the thrilling news was given out of the capture of Bushnell.

General Grant sent at once for the young officers of the Blues to report to him.

In the presence of his staff he gave them words of praise and said:

"Boys, you have won glory to-day and I know that a great future is assured you. In a few days we shall move upon Fort Donelson and then I shall look for you to win further laurels."

The boys thanked their general warmly and went back to their comrades. It was a proud day and hour for them.

In the capture of Fort Henry the Fairdale Blues and Captain Jack Clark had taken a brave and honorable part.

But new victories and thrilling incidents were in reserve for them in the near future, the detailing of which we will reserve for a future story, and right here write

THE END.

Read "AT FAIR OAKS; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY WINNING OUT," which will be the next number (10) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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